

THE Atlantic MONTHLY

DECEMBER 2002

A Picture of Health

John F. Kennedy's physical condition was far worse than we imagined—and his deception far greater. A historian examines newly available medical records

BY ROBERT DALLEK

PLUS: Our "Genius" Problem

BY MARJORIE GARBER

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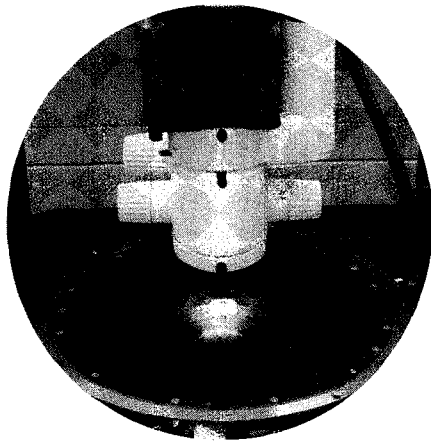
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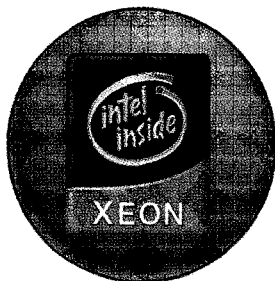
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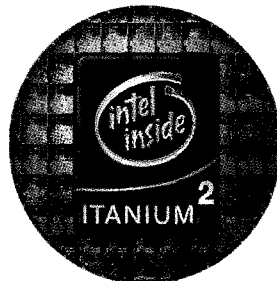
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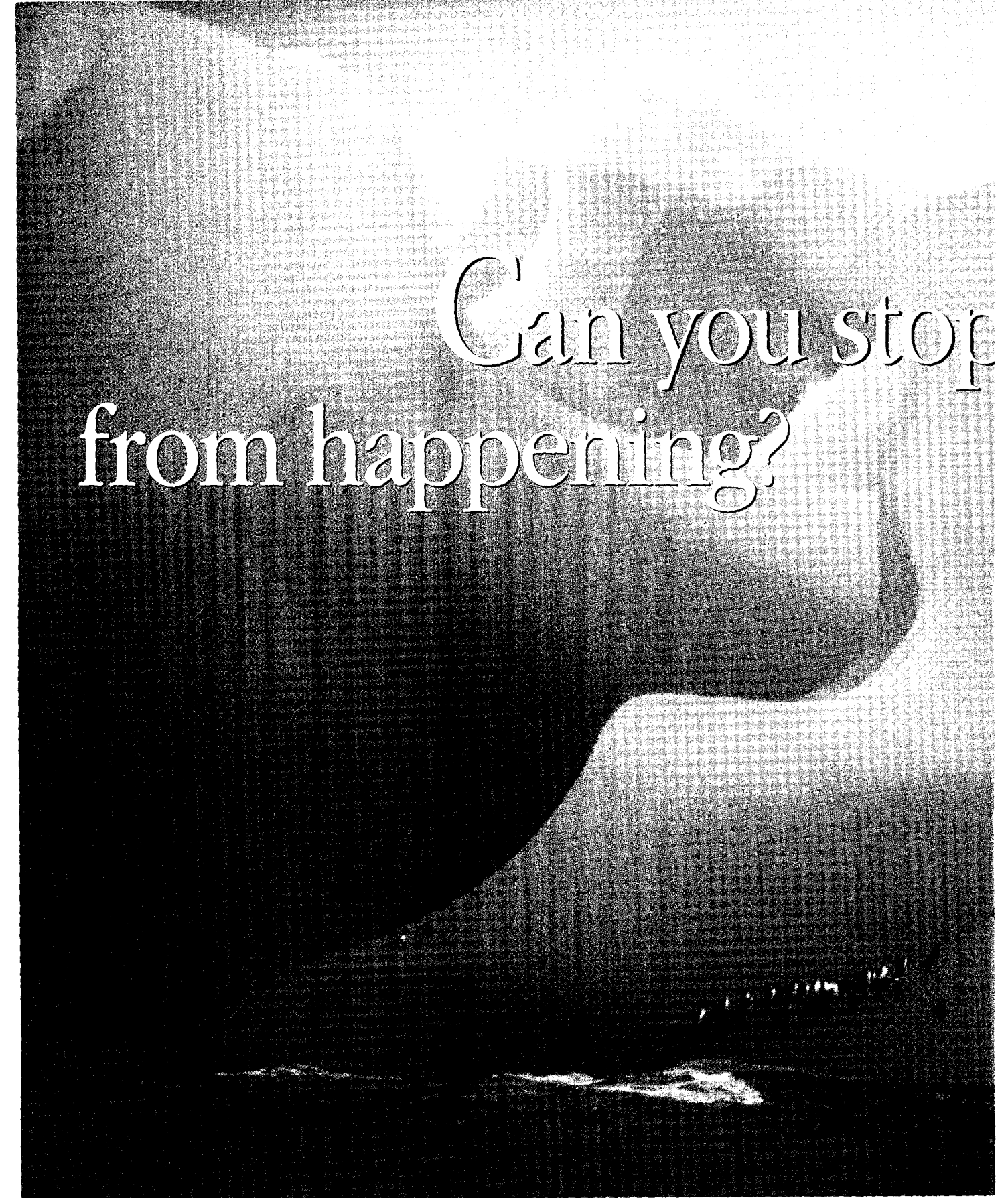
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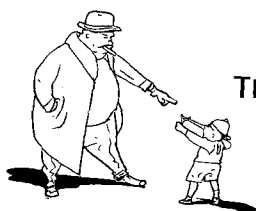
The arts speak in a universal language, inspiring us to envision new possibilities and reach ever higher. In this spirit, the people of Philip Morris are proud to support this exhibition and the groundbreaking cultural partnership between the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and Russia's State Pushkin Museum that made it possible.

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THE Atlantic

This month on the Web...

Interview Robert Dallek discusses "The Medical Ordeals of JFK," his article in this month's issue.

from the Archives H. L. Mencken in *The Atlantic Monthly* A collection of writing by Mencken from the pages of *The Atlantic*, along with a review of Mencken's work by Jacques Barzun, and remembrances of the critic by Alistair Cooke and Alfred A. Knopf.

Interview Corby Kummer and food writer at *The Atlantic* talks about his new book, *The Pleasures of Slow Food: Celebrating Authentic Traditions, Flavors, and Recipes*.

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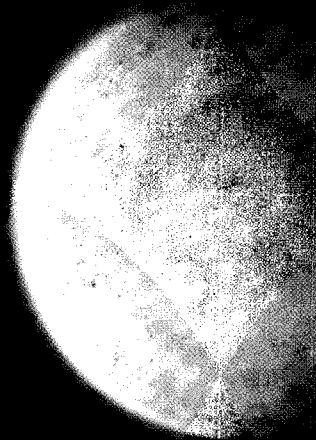
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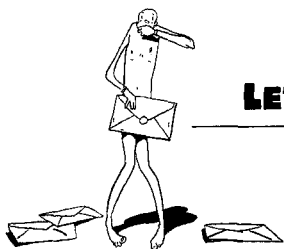
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Next Christianity

In "The Next Christianity" (October *Atlantic*), Philip Jenkins projects a cogent scenario of an ascendant Southern global Christianity. It would exercise in the twenty-first century a supranational influence on all of Christendom. He suggests persuasively that a more conservative, even obscurantist theology will place serious strains on the forward-looking, liberating impulses emanating from Northern churches. These influences, he says, may even outweigh concurrent intrusions from an only slightly less rapidly growing Islam.

In his discussion Jenkins only once mentions the Enlightenment—that seminal event in Western history that was ultimately anchored in northwestern Europe and in North America. It incubated the industrial and political revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It spawned in evolving Christendom, Jenkins correctly notes, "such fundamental ideas of modern society as the state's obligation to tolerate minorities and the need to justify political authority without constantly invoking God and religion."

We have seen in the twentieth century how some of the roots of the Enlightenment have projected outward to the developing rich countries, East and South. Here has occurred a revolution in living standards, strengthened by the increasing accessibility of quality advanced education, notably in America, for numerous future world leaders. Might not the forces unleashed by the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment gain worldwide accessibility in the twenty-first century and ultimately serve as a powerful defense against the effects of retrograde religious dogma?

*Chester Low
Middleburg, Va.*

Philip Jenkins treats the Christian faith in North America monolithically, using such designations as "the Northern liberals" and "the liberal West." Such broad strokes could leave the impression that the distinctions about which Jenkins writes exist *only* between Northerners and Southerners, and not also among Northerners themselves. In truth, a great many Christian believers in North America may, on certain key points such as taking the Bible seriously and even to a large extent literally, find more in common with at least some Southern Christians than with many fellow Northerners. This does not diminish the accuracy of Jenkins's overall picture of worldwide Christianity, but it may suggest that this picture is more nuanced (and perhaps, therefore, more interesting) than his article suggests. If and when North meets South, the encounter may be marked not only by glaring clashes but also by curious convergences out of which may emerge new global relationships among otherwise diverse Christian groups.

*The Rev. Scott Hoezee
Calvin Christian Reformed Church
Grand Rapids, Mich.*

Philip Jenkins accurately points out the profound demographic shift of Christianity toward the Third World, particularly in Africa. However, the competition between Christianity and Islam, particularly in Africa, may be the real story. Currently the world has about 1.9 billion Christians and 1.3 billion Muslims. But as your The World in Numbers section points out, further growth in population will be very uneven in the next fifty years. Projections suggest that the Muslim population will at least double, to 2.7 billion, by 2050, while the Christian population will grow by about 50 percent, to about 2.8 billion. Surging African numbers will not fully compensate for stasis or decline in developed Christian countries.

These projections may also overlook two key trends. First is the creation of a Muslim Europe, with immigrants giving rise to Muslim minorities of 10 or 20 percent in France, Germany, and other European nations. The other trend is the impact of AIDS.

AIDS could have profound consequences for the relative performances of Christianity and Islam, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Muslim North and West Africa has been largely spared the devastation that has torn through Christian East and South Africa. Not only are Muslims less likely to engage in social practices that lead to viral transmission (an imperfect defense at best), but circumcised males in Africa become infected and pass on infection at substantially lower rates with a similar level of viral exposure. Unless Christian Africa can find a way to halt the HIV epidemic, the demographic ascent of Christianity may be significantly blunted.

*Nayyer Ali
Huntington Beach, Calif.*

Philip Jenkins's observations of the differences between the Northern and the Southern Church are compelling. One of the differences he points to is that the Northern Church tends toward intellectualism and liberalism and is predominantly from the First World, whereas the Southern Church is predominantly conservative and resides essentially in the Third World.

The failure of the Northern Church is that it has no way of reconciling its current position, on the top of the human pyramid, with the teachings of the early Church fathers. Today the United States has far more in common with first-century Rome than it does with the first-century Church. Jesus did not come to heal the healthy.

*Peter Boehmer
Monhegan Island, Maine*

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Philip Jenkins replies:

I take Chester Low's point about the possibility of a new Enlightenment, though I would dearly like to see a future that avoided the extremes of both religious fanaticism and secular utopianism. Peter Boehmer raises what may be a central issue in this whole matter: namely, the "eye of the needle" problem of whether Christianity can be reconciled with wealth and power.

Scott Hoezee objects that I draw a false distinction between the liberal West and the not-so-liberal South. As it stands, this is a fair objection, and I have written in greater detail about exactly this point elsewhere, chiefly in my book The Next Christendom. He might also have added that African churches (say) are nothing like monolithic: there are liberal and modern-minded churches south of the Equator as well. Yet I believe that the broad distinction I draw is valid.

Nayyer Ali disputes my numerical projections regarding the relative status of Christianity and Islam in the next half century. Briefly, I am using United Nations projections as well as U.S. Census data; where there is a discrepancy between the two, I usually err on the side of conservatism. And I most certainly do take account of the horrifying impact of AIDS: my figures would be worthless otherwise. I think it is important to draw from as large a "basket" of projections as possible, at every stage seeking to understand the bases for forecasts and the possible sources of error. In short, I stand by my figures.

This having been said, both demographic and religious projections are of necessity subject to error, and the religious balance may well be reshaped by political trends. In Rwanda the appalling behavior of some Christian leaders during the 1994 genocide has driven hundreds of thousands of people in that country to convert to Islam; local Muslims acted heroically in trying to prevent mass murder. In presenting my statistics I claim no sense of prophetic infallibility: things may well change. But the picture I present in the article represents what is at the moment the most likely scenario.

American Ground

This past June I flew from Chicago to Dallas aboard American Airlines. I found myself seated among a group of American Airlines flight attendants en route to a business meeting in Dallas.

I began a conversation with the flight attendant seated next to me. As we became comfortable speaking to each other, I asked her if the events of 9/11 had changed her feelings about flying. She turned to me and with quiet dignity told me that her best friend had been an attendant aboard Flight 11. She told me how her friend had called their office in Boston, and how she had listened in as her friend tried to relate where her hijacked plane was heading. This beautiful blonde lady held back the tears I saw accumulate in her eyes as she told me what her friend had said: "I see water, I see buildings, oh, my God!" And then the line went dead.

I was shocked when, while reading William Langewiesche's "American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center" in the September *Atlantic*, I came across this exact story and read her friend's last words almost exactly as they had been related to me. Reading the article helped me to understand just how important the events of 9/11 have been to our lives, and how many people were personally affected.

Janie Paine
Rockford, Ill.

For someone who is accustomed to sandwiching her reading between other activities, I was amazed to find that I simply could not put William Langewiesche's articles down. I devoured them during my morning bus commute and continued reading as I walked along busy downtown streets from the bus stop to my office, glancing up only at the crosswalks to make sure it was safe to cross. The depth and breadth of Langewiesche's coverage—from the technical details of the engineering feat that was the WTC to the varied and complex range of human emotions manifested before, during, and after the tragic attack of 9/11—was magnificent. I appreciated his compassionate attitude toward all those who suffered and struggled in the aftermath, even as he let us see the less than noble side of human nature. I didn't go to New York after 9/11 to see the site, and now I regret that I never saw with my own eyes the scale of the destruction and cleanup operations, which Langewiesche depicts so

brilliantly. However, I do feel that I have been there—albeit as Langewiesche's imaginary travel companion—in a way that I never could have been just standing on the viewing deck. I thank him for describing a world and a period of time that with each passing day slip deeper and deeper into the realm of America's collective myth.

Shoshanah Dubiner
San Francisco, Calif.

Just a note to say thank you for publishing the three-part "American Ground," by William Langewiesche, the third installment of which was the best of all.

Having read those pieces, I believe I now have a very special insight into the physical implications of the disaster on September 11 and the year following that those who did not read the articles will never quite have. What happened on that day was bad enough; however, we should all be aware of the further disasters that were prevented by the ingenuity and daring of those who were suddenly thrust into positions of responsibility.

These articles are a piece of Americana, ranging from the descriptions of the depths of our national spirit to insights into the field of engineering that should be read by amateur and professional alike.

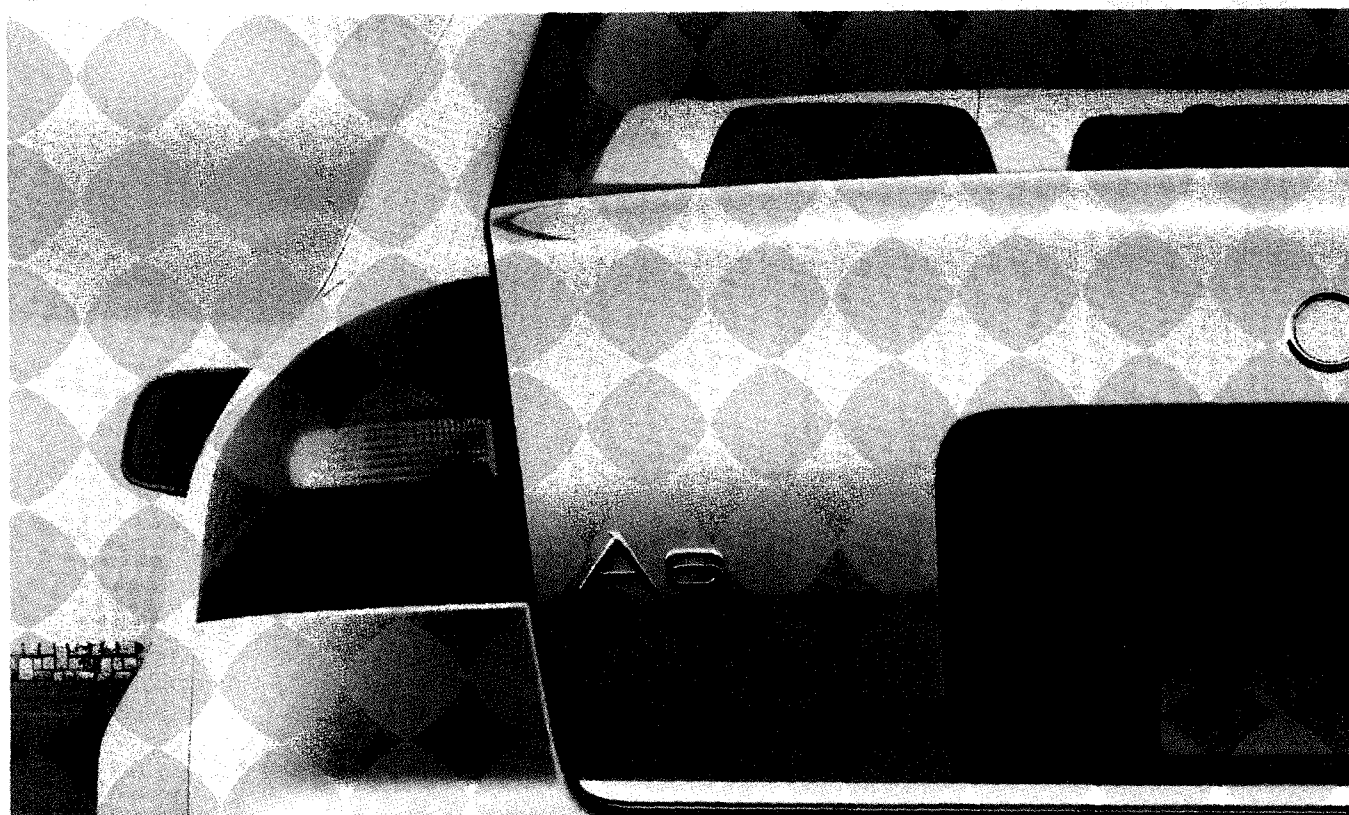
You assigned the right man to the job.
Herb Weinberg
Colorado Springs, Colo.

William Langewiesche does a disservice to the many Bechtel men and women who were helping out at Ground Zero and elsewhere in Lower Manhattan within hours of the attack. In the October issue Langewiesche (or an unnamed source) mischaracterizes discussions between Bechtel people and New York City officials about the possibility of Bechtel's playing a larger role in the recovery and cleanup effort. In fact city officials expressed concerns about site safety, contractor coordination, accountability, insurance, and indemnification—efforts and issues that might be managed more efficiently by a private-sector company with experience in disaster relief. Impressed by our effectiveness on site, and mindful of our global credentials for disaster relief, City Hall

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asked Bechtel to submit a management proposal to support the World Trade Center recovery and cleanup effort. Bechtel did exactly that—but not before offering the names of other firms we felt were also qualified to do what needed to be done. The Department of Design and Construction asked another company to submit a proposal, which was ultimately accepted.

Cliff Mumm
President, Bechtel Construction Operations
Frederick, Md.

Editor's Note:

A long electronic document was recently sent to this office concerning William Langewiesche's "American Ground." The document, written by Rhonda Roland Shearer, the director of a group she calls the World Trade Center Living History Project, was also sent to at least one newspaper, and is available on the Web. The document takes angry exception to Langewiesche's characterization of the efforts at the World Trade Center site and levels many charges at the author and his reporting. For the record, The Atlantic stands behind William Langewiesche and his reporting, and is proud to have published his exceptional series of articles.

One of the more emotional matters raised by Ms. Shearer's document concerns looting at the World Trade Center site, and the account of the discovery of stacks of blue jeans inside a fire truck recovered from the rubble. Ms. Shearer vehemently denies that such an event took place, explaining that the jeans were spread all around the area, and did not originate in the ruined truck, and she cites several eyewitnesses to back up her understanding of the story. For this and other reasons, primarily of interpretation, she argues that Langewiesche's work is libelous, and that the book that resulted from it should be withdrawn and shredded. Because of the emotional register of this one issue in particular, we asked William Langewiesche to reply.

William Langewiesche replies:

"American Ground," my history of the World Trade Center recovery project, is, as many readers and reviewers have noted, overwhelmingly a positive one. However, some aspects of the response—small, and on the scale of the cleanup relatively

unimportant—did not fit the images that were being publicly portrayed. The story of the jeans is obviously one of them. Having been told it at the time by an eyewitness, I found other eyewitnesses who, uncoached, repeated the same details. As a writer committed to reporting on the Trade Center project with clear eyes, and as accurately as possible, I felt it was necessary to include it. Omission, however comfortable, would have been propagandistic, and implicitly insulting to readers. I was of course aware of the sensitivity of this incident. The description I included was short, and tightly contained to the scene on the "pile." It provided no identities of any sort—by location, date, unit, or name—and it engaged in no speculation. During the five months of exhaustive fact-checking by the magazine, the story was verified by multiple eyewitnesses. We have since gone back to those sources, and found others who were at the scene—all of whom repeat the core of the story.

The World Trade Center disaster was unquestionably a highly traumatic experience for all Americans, and the emotions that arose in its wake were powerful and heartfelt. However, once I was given special access to the site, and had made a commitment to stay there day in and day out, I saw my role as attempting to write something like a history in the present tense. This entailed a certain mental distance—observing the scene without a prior overlay, and trying to get beyond the acute emotionalism that was coloring and distorting understandings both inside and outside the project. It was predictable that the results of such an approach would offend a certain number of people who, whether for lack of information or for emotional reasons, subscribed to a completely different view—the essentially cartoonish one that has received so much publicity, and depicts the Trade Center project in simplistically heroic terms. I do not perceive the project that way, and never have. Rather more impressive, I felt, was another sort of American greatness that emerged at the site—a complex weave that included diverse acts and motivations, and also a culture of improvisational genius that seemed particular to our country, and enormously encouraging about the future. There was no need to engage in propaganda—and if there ever is, then I am not the

right person for it. I wrote about the Trade Center experience on the assumption that the most honest possible description—warts and all—would in the long run serve history and The Atlantic's readers best.

Homeland Insecurity

Charles Mann ("Homeland Insecurity," September *Atlantic*) states that if Facelt has a 99.32 percent success rate on faces it matches with terrorists, then 170,000 people will be mistakenly identified as terrorists each year at Boston's Logan Airport. This is wrong. The success rate is based on matches, not on the number of people who use the airport. If, out of the 25 million people who go through the airport each year, a thousand are identified as terrorists, only about seven would be mistakenly identified. My question is, What is the chance that a terrorist would not be matched?

Jeremy Hambly
Seattle, Wash.

Charles C. Mann's article includes a minor error: the claim that INTELINK, SIPRNET, and NIPRNET are encrypted and not connected to the Internet. This is true only of INTELINK and SIPRNET. NIPRNET may or may not carry encrypted data and is generally connected to the Internet. Access to NIPRNET from accounts without .gov and .mil addresses is frequently shut off during times of worm or DoS activity, but otherwise it is accessible.

Matthew Kennedy
Arlington, Va.

I am writing to correct an inaccuracy in "Homeland Insecurity." Charles C. Mann states, "In March [of 2002] CERT/CC, a computer-security watchdog based at Carnegie Mellon University, warned of thirty-eight vulnerabilities in Oracle's database software." This statement is incorrect. CERT listed nineteen potential vulnerabilities, not thirty-eight, of which several were not security vulnerabilities per se but failures to configure the software properly. It is also important to note that at the time the advisory was issued by CERT, Oracle had already issued either security

patches or workarounds for all identified potential vulnerabilities.

Mary Ann Davidson
Chief Security Officer
Oracle Corporation
Redwood Shores, Calif.

Charles C. Mann replies:

As Jeremy Hambly's letter suggests, I failed to express my argument clearly. Let me try again. Face-recognition software employs a number of criteria for matching faces. These criteria can be applied with greater or lesser stringency, which leads to greater or lesser likelihood of false positives and false negatives. If the criteria for declaring a match are made more stringent, the percentage of false positives will go down but the percentage of false negatives will rise. If the criteria for a match are less stringent, the opposite will happen.

Facelt claims an "equal error rate," where the two lines cross, of 0.68 percent. Because the software identifies each passenger as either an innocent or a terrorist, 0.68 percent of the total number of passengers is the number of people who will be misidentified

one way or the other. At Logan Airport, in Boston, the software would have scanned the faces of 25 million passengers last year, resulting in 170,000 false identifications. The overwhelming majority of those false identifications would have been, as I wrote, innocent people misidentified as terrorists. The additional cost and disruption, to passengers and airlines alike, of interrogating and screening those people would be enormous.

One could set the criteria to reduce that number of false alarms, but then the risk of missing real terrorists would be dramatically increased—the tradeoff is unavoidable. And a security system that either fails in its principal task or causes major disruption is not desirable.

Mary Ann Davidson is right: CERT did warn of nineteen security holes in Oracle's products, rather than thirty-eight; the organization listed them in two different forms in its bulletin, confusing me. Oracle had indeed previously released patches and workarounds, but repeatedly gluing on Band-Aids after the fact for multiple systems is so time-consuming that system administrators rarely do it. (Any home user who has

tried to deal with the many security patches from Microsoft can easily imagine why.) In part, the CERT announcement may have been an effort to help administrators keep track of the torrent of security issues from the company that advertises its software as "unbreakable."

School Vouchers

In his Agenda essay on school vouchers ("Reversing White Flight," October *Atlantic*) Jonathan Rauch writes, "Competition would improve the performance of public schools, just as it improves the performance of people and companies." Competition often yields the lowest-cost product or service, but it makes no promise about quality, unless quality is specified and required. Remember, "competition" gave us an airport-security system that failed to stop even one of the hijackers on 9/11! If competition and vouchers would significantly improve the performance of school systems, we would be reading articles about that, instead of about the failure of charter

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schools, for-profit schools, and so forth.

Rauch writes, "Poor, predominantly minority children attend dysfunctional and often dangerous schools." But when we say that a school is dysfunctional, we are looking only at the symptom. The failure lies not with the school but with the community. The community is failing, is dysfunctional, if it is not demanding that the best teachers be hired and be paid accordingly, if it is not demanding that parents prepare their children to do their best in school, if it permits children to spend more than twenty hours a week on sports and work, if parents do not require that homework be finished before the TV is turned on. Perhaps that community needs pre-pre-kindergarten, and year-round school six days a week, to overcome the educational deficits of the parents. Otherwise the community is blaming the schools for the unsolved and unadmitted problems that originate in the homes of that community.

Fred Powell
Middlebury, Vt.

Jonathan Rauch errs in his argument about the positive effects of vouchers on poor and minority students. New Zealand's experience stands as the largest and oldest case study. In the early 1990s New Zealand granted all public schools complete operational autonomy and at the same time abolished attendance zones. Parents could apply to any school in the country. Vouchers followed students to their school of choice. Within a short time the best schools filled up and became highly selective in their admissions and retention policies. Hard-to-teach students, disproportionately poor and minority, were turned away and forced to return to their schools of origin. As a result, schools became significantly more polarized along ethnic and socioeconomic lines than before. Seeing the dire results, the government began to back away. New Zealand is not the United States, but it shares many of our values and traditions. Moreover, it has a sizable minority population of Maoris and Pacific Islanders, many of whom live in the inner cities. The country is still trying to recover from its grand experiment with vouchers.

Walt Gardner
Los Angeles, Calif.

Life's Work

In her review of Lisa Belkin's *Life's Work: Confessions of an Unbalanced Mom* ("The Mother Load," October *Atlantic*), Caitlin Flanagan pokes fun at the author's guilt and ambivalence over combining work with child-rearing. Further, she suggests, "The day will come when a modern American mother can spend sixty hours a week apart from her children without a second thought; it's almost here. Whether this day will represent a cultural advance—or a human one—is highly debatable."

I would argue that the book and the review share two fundamental but flawed assumptions about the way the world must be. First, both writers assume that child-rearing is a woman's task, not a parental task—that women, rather than parents, must make choices. Second, both writers assume that a sixty-hour week is a prerequisite for a career of note.

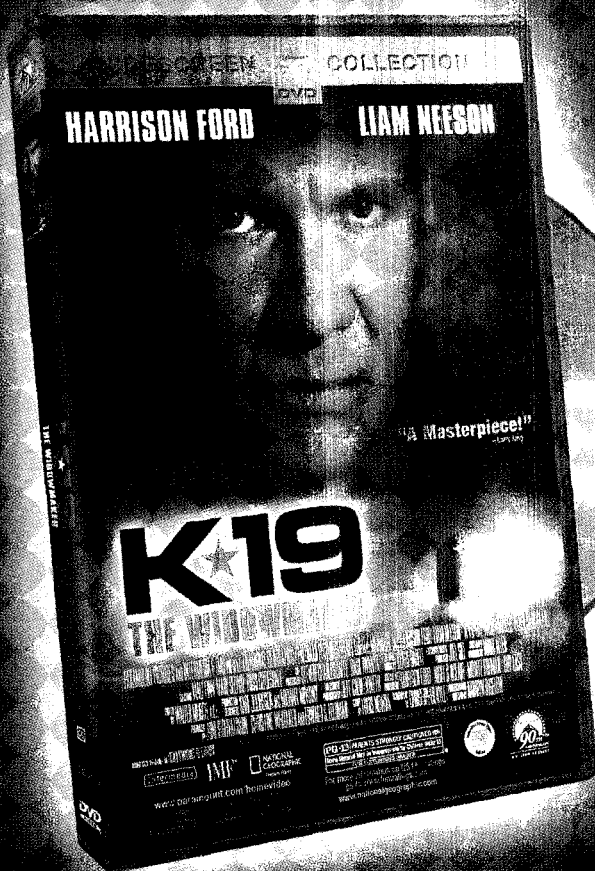
We will make real progress on arranging matters of family and work when we question these assumptions and shape a culture in which they are invalid. Men as well as women need and deserve the opportunity to contribute to family life and to make choices about how to balance it with work. And we need to recognize that Americans—all Americans—work too many hours. We work more hours than Europeans, even more hours than Japanese, and we have family-leave policies that citizens of other countries find horrifying.

Nora S. Newcombe
Merion, Pa.

Caitlin Flanagan replies:

My review of Life's Work does not assume that child-rearing is solely a mother's responsibility; it merely comments on Lisa Belkin's attitude about motherhood. Furthermore, I have good news for Nora Newcombe: upper-middle-class men and women do have choices—lots of them—about how to combine work and parenthood. That so many of these well-educated professionals willingly arrange their lives so that they spend less time with their own children than the working poor spend with theirs seems to me a curious decision.

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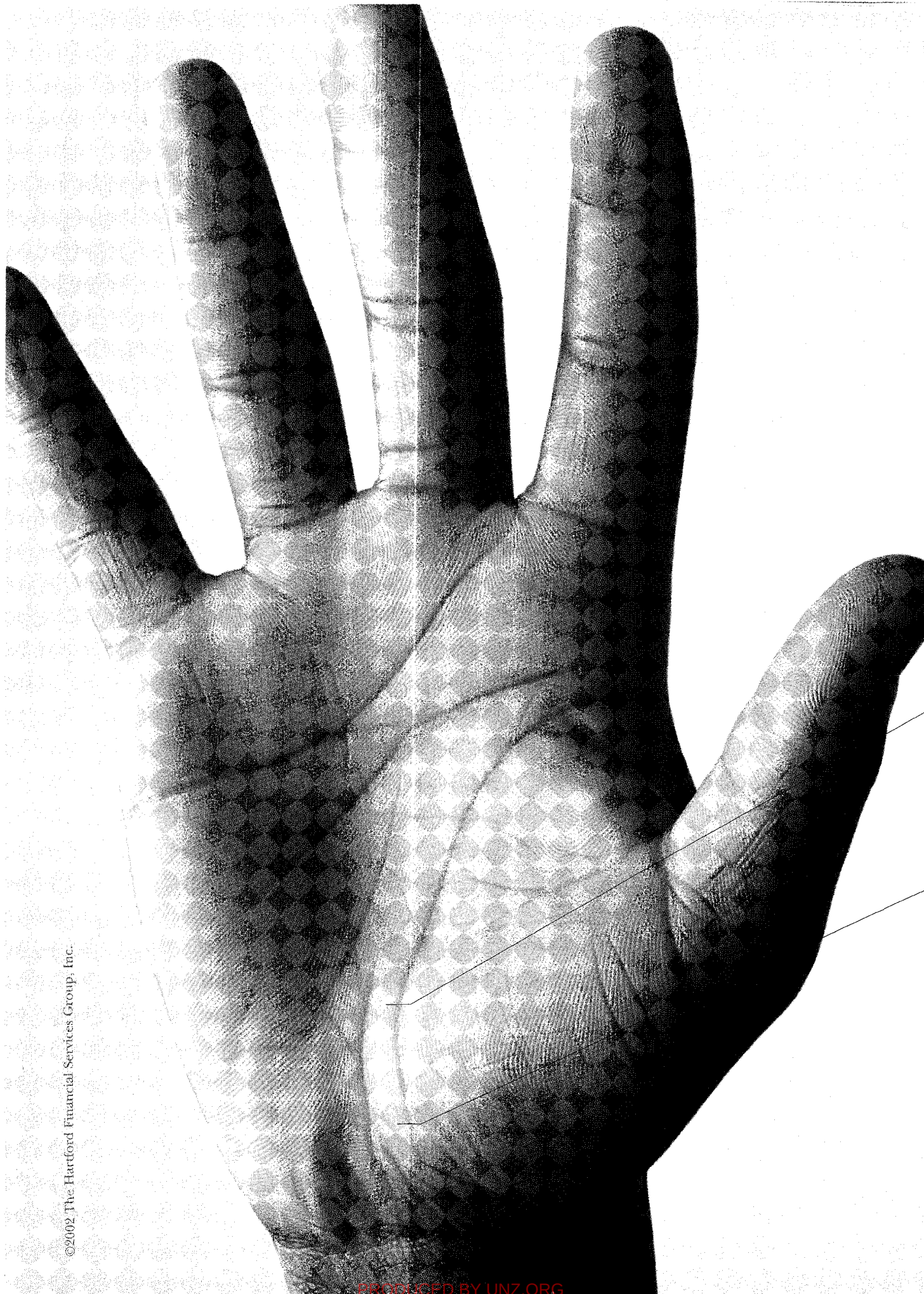
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INNOCENT BYSTANDER

by CULLEN MURPHY

THE ROGUES OF ACADEME

Making dictators an offer they can't refuse

.....

The repertoire of methods employed to rid nations of their undemocratic or loathsome rulers is at once familiar and limited. There is assassination, coup d'état, and war. There are economic sanctions. On the rare occasions when elections come into the picture, there is sometimes an international effort to ensure that the elections are fair.

Now Boston University is experimenting with a new approach—the Lloyd G. Balfour African Presidents in Residence Program. The idea, simply put, is that democratically elected African leaders might not be so prone to overstay their welcome as chief executives (or to keep meddling in local politics after leaving office) if they had a well-endowed university sinecure in the United States to look forward to. The first President-in-residence is Kenneth Kaunda, who served as the President of Zambia under less than democratic circumstances for twenty-seven years, but ultimately left office of his own accord when an election was held and he lost. Kaunda will receive a presumably generous stipend (the amount is undisclosed) and live in a Back Bay home overlooking the Charles River. Boston University will become the repository of his papers. Charles Stith, a former U.S. ambassador to Tanzania and the director of the university's African Presidential Archives and Research Center, told *The Wall Street Journal*, "It sends a message to some of these other folks who are reluctant to step aside that there are a set of options, and when they do the right thing, good things can happen."

The Balfour program has its eye on a number of future candidates, including

Uganda's longtime President, Yoweri Museveni. According to newspaper accounts, officials at Boston University would especially welcome the chance to entice Robert Mugabe away from Zimbabwe, where his two-decade rule is spiraling toward catastrophe.

The management dilemma posed by the world's dictators is acute. Many of them simply don't want to leave office, and those who might want to leave often have no place to go where they will be safe from legal badgering and physical reprisals. I addressed the problem in this



space some years ago (in the April 1992 *Atlantic*), proposing the establishment of an exclusive community called The Last Resort, a prosecution-free zone on an island in the Indian Ocean for dictators needing that one final incentive. Of course there were certain conditions (you could never leave), and the rules of the island were subtly designed to exact, over time, a terrible toll in retribution.

Boston University's scheme represents an important new development, one that reflects recent changes in expert thinking about penology. Prisons around the world are overcrowded, and analysts raise legitimate concerns about the long-term effects of prison culture

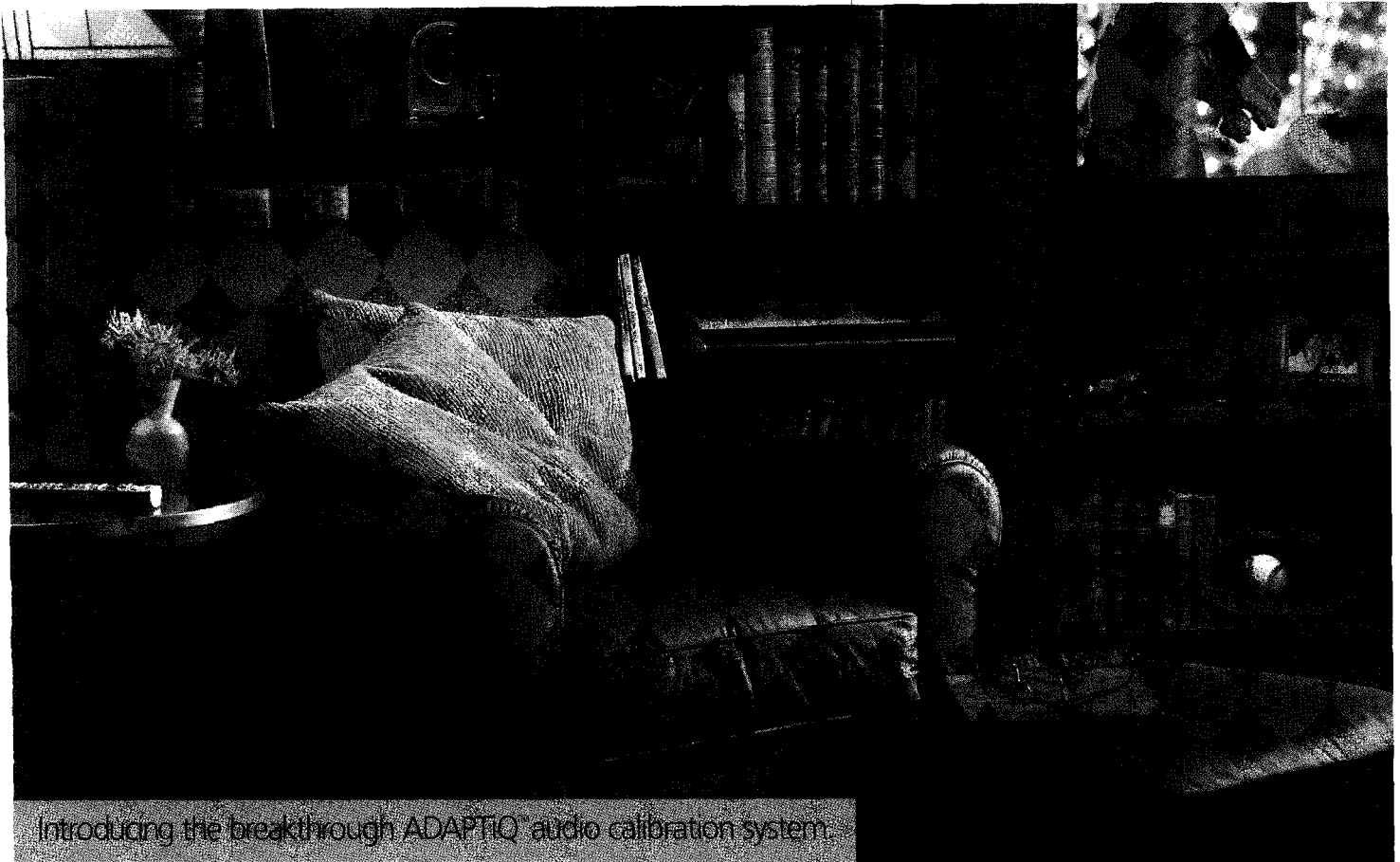
on inmates. (Authorities in Kentucky, for instance, recently discovered that satanic worship services were being held under official auspices at the Green River Correctional Complex.) Inevitably, more thought is being given to ways in which certain kinds of malefactors can remain at large in society, albeit subject to strict rules and intensive monitoring. The Balfour program extends the concept to the international level, and the recruitment of Kenneth Kaunda (Charles Stith somewhat inaptly termed it a "coup") will give the effort a high profile.

The program also invites speculation about ways in which the general idea might be broadened, in order to match the diverse talents of some of our longest-serving world leaders. The State of Florida, for instance, found itself in need of a new secretary of state last summer, when Katherine Harris announced her resignation in order to seek a congressional seat. Harris, a Republican, was the Florida official who oversaw the recount effort in the aftermath of the 2000 presidential election, an effort that ultimately awarded the state (and the presidency) to

George W. Bush. Surely the prospect of this sort of opportunity in state government would lure Aleksandr Lukashenko, the only dictator left in Europe, from his position as President of Belarus (the former Soviet Republic of Belorussia). Lukashenko is clearly up to the job: it has been alleged that during a crucial 1996 referendum he and his forces added a million paper ballots to the voting boxes at the last minute, bending the outcome to their will.

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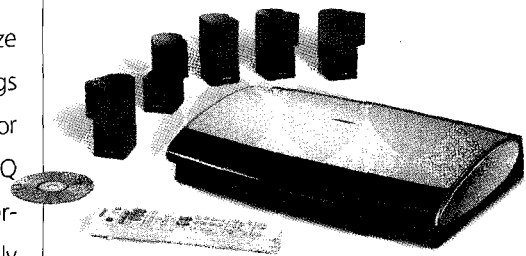
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Richard Roeper, to take the place of the late Gene Siskel, Ebert's colleague of twenty-four years. But *Ebert & Roeper and the Movies* still needs the occasional guest host—a chance to persuade Kim Jong Il, North Korea's "Dear Leader" and dynastic despot, to leave Pyongyang behind. Kim would be perfect. Every capsule biography makes reference to his deep interest in film: he owns some 25,000 movies, and as both auteur and producer has been intimately involved with nurturing North Korea's film industry. At least locally, Kim's own work has won wide critical acclaim (unanimous, in fact). And he's apparently up to the banter and byplay that a co-host role demands: the North Korean government described Kim a few years ago as "a great maker of witty remarks."

For all the opportunities in other fields, the visionaries at Boston University are probably correct in their hunch that academe is the most suitable enclave for the world's potential presidents-for-life.

For instance, the University of Virginia has recently been in the news because of questions raised about its vaunted honor system. Critics say that the venerable set of procedures, overseen by students, is highly capricious, levying severe penalties on some students while dealing lightly with others for similar offenses. The proceedings are also prolonged and mysterious. These flaws would become a thing of the past if Mohammed Omar, the one-eyed Taliban leader and former ruler of Afghanistan, were placed in charge. Mullah Omar was known for his severity (summarily hanging miscreants from the barrels of tanks, or burying them alive) but never for delay (he brooked no appeals) or capriciousness (he spared no one). Omar has been in hiding since last October, and has probably missed the newspaper reports about UVA. But if the Air Force is still dropping emergency food supplies in the remoter parts of Afghanistan, it should consider including some copies of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Harvard could very well get to Robert Mugabe before Boston University, and with a better offer. Harvard spent

much of the 1990s secretly buying up parcels of land in Boston, through a front company, in order to facilitate the university's expansion in the twenty-first century—a subterfuge that sparked outrage among city leaders and community activists. In recent years Mugabe has made a specialty of land expropriation in the face of local opposition; what is more, he has done so in broad daylight. Harvard's new president, Lawrence Summers, might even learn a thing or two from Mugabe.

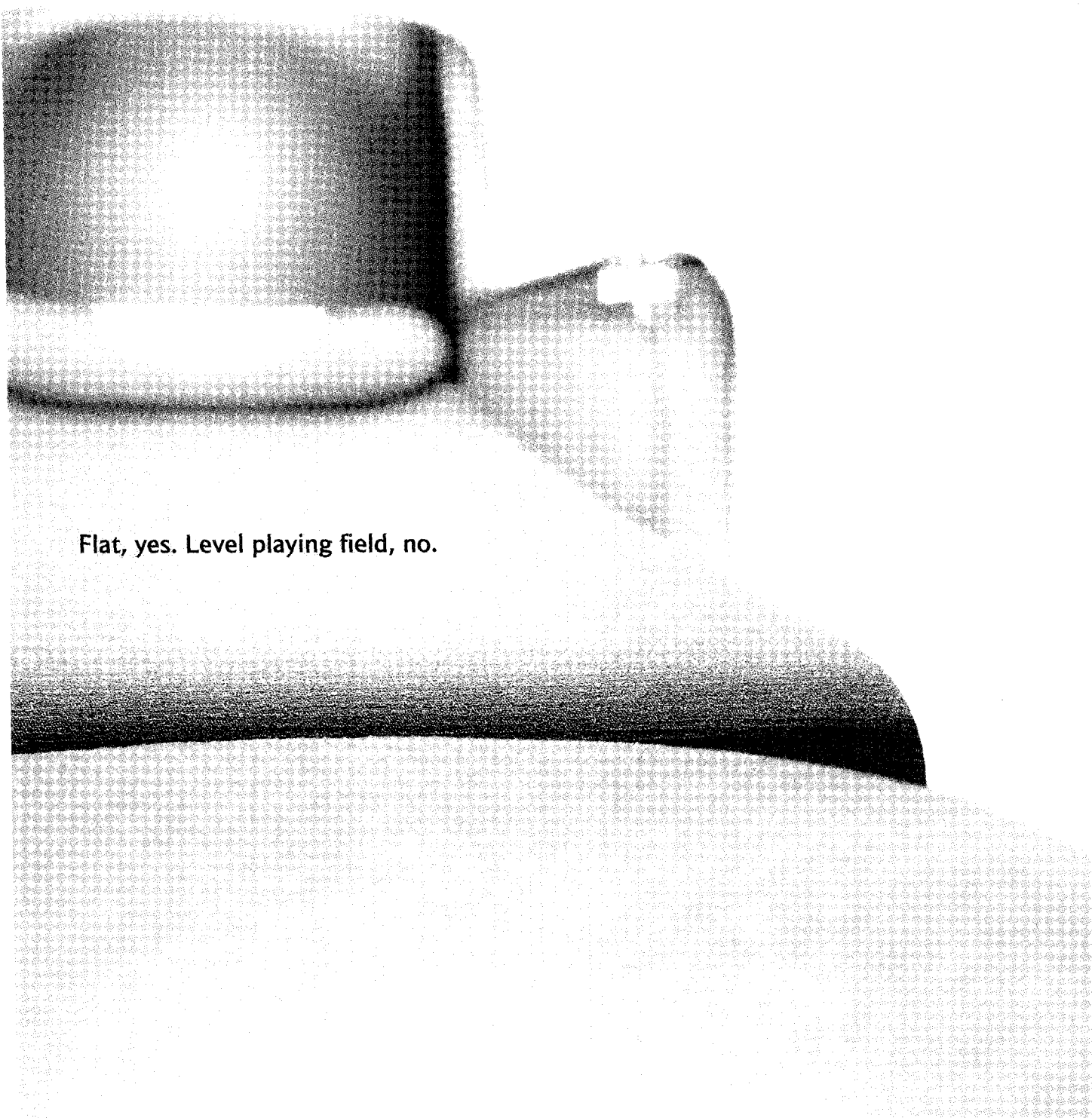
The political turmoil within certain academic departments at some prestigious universities is intense, and on occasion administrators have actually had to bring in scholars from outside the school to chair departments that have disintegrated into warring camps. Columbia University's English department—torn by internecine conflicts among traditionalists and multiculturalists, feminists and deconstructionists—was effectively placed in receivership last year, and a professor from the University of Pittsburgh, Jonathan Arac, was put in charge. Such divisions, of course, would be deemed a mere trifle by someone like the ophthalmologist-turned-strongman Bashar al-Assad. For three decades the Assad family has brutally checked the centrifugal forces (Druze, Christians, Alawite Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Kurds, Armenians, Palestinians) that would otherwise tear apart "Syria"—a mental construct no less laughable than "English department" can sometimes be. Assad would be more than a match for any cabal of post-structuralists and semioticians.

It is hard to overestimate how much good the Balfour program could ultimately do if it takes hold. And there's no reason why the effort should not run in the other direction as well. It cannot have escaped notice in the program's home precincts that Boston University itself has been governed by someone who seems to have become a president-for-life—the authoritarian and irascible John Silber. Yes, he has had his eye on the Taliban job; but his assumption of even the Zambian presidency would cap a remarkable career, and would be widely endorsed at home. ▀

Cullen Murphy is The Atlantic's managing editor.



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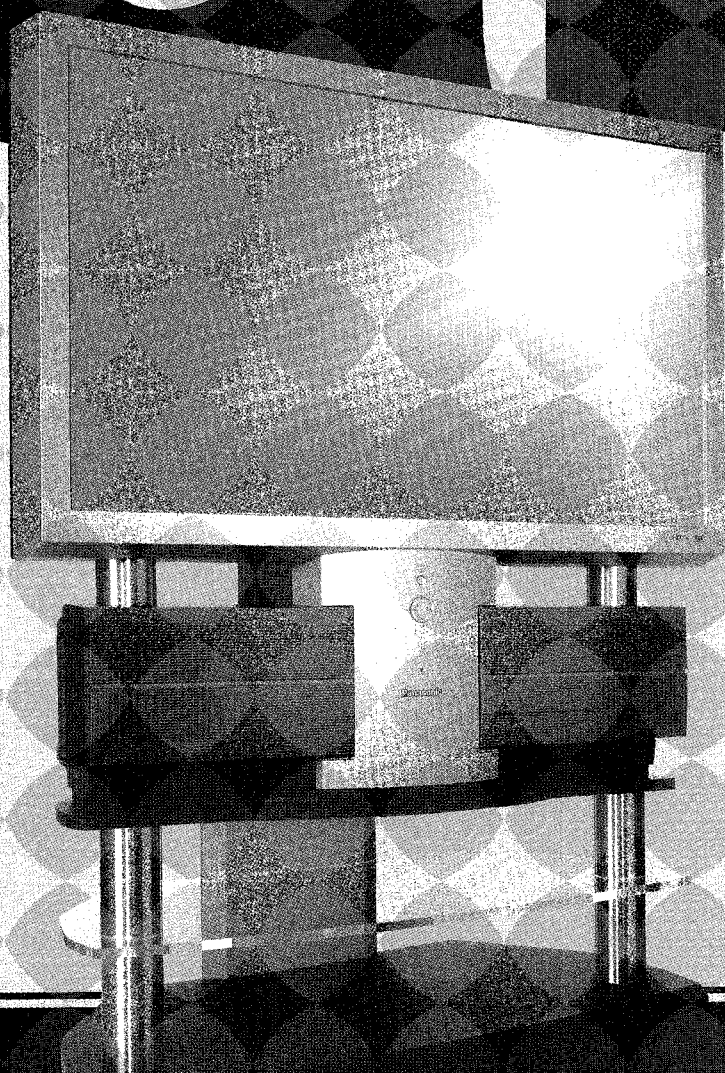
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THE AGENDA

THIS MONTH, essays on the importance of imagination, obesity as revenue enhancer, and a prototypical modern thinker

DAVID BROOKS

"Imagination is amphibious. It lives in the worlds of both reason and fantasy. It blends the material and the spiritual."

PAGE 30

JONATHAN RAUCH

"I think I detect a hint of snobbery in the national anti-fat drive. More than occasionally I read things like a recent article headlined 'AMERICA: LAND OF THE FAT, DRUNKEN SLOBS.'"

PAGE 32

P. J. O'ROURKE

"With Henry Adams we see the moment when the pronouncements of philosophers ceased to be greeted with forehead slaps of recognition or shouts of 'Heretic!' and began to be met with mumbles of 'Oh, shut up.'"

PAGE 34

EYAL PRESS & JENNIFER WASHBURN

"Monitoring youth services has become especially challenging in recent years, since government agencies began shipping juveniles across state lines. 'We have less regulation of the interstate commerce in troubled kids than of meat products,' says the president of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency."

PAGE 38

PRIMARY SOURCES

"Vermont, the least significant polluter among the fifty states, by itself emits more greenhouse gases than thirty-three developing countries combined."

PAGE 42

THE WORLD IN NUMBERS

"Retail gun outlets outnumber McDonald's restaurants in America, and the ratio of guns to people is almost one to one."

PAGE 46

WHAT NOW?

Developments, encouraging and otherwise

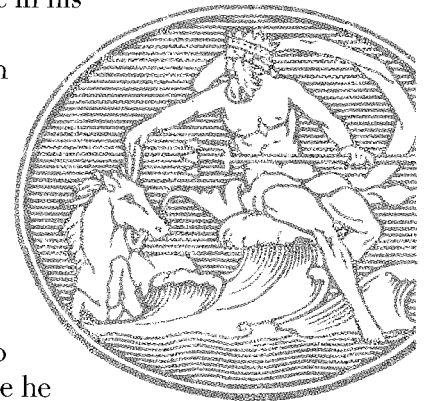
BY MICHAEL KELLY

.....

What can I do? I'm not perfect, alas," bravely admitted the New Jersey poet laureate Amiri Baraka, a.k.a. LeRoi Jones, in discussing the negative reaction to his brave new work, "Somebody Blew Up America," in which he bravely asked, "Who know who decide / Jesus get crucified? ... Who know why Five Israelis was filming the explosion / And cracking they sides at the notion ... Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed / Who told 4000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers / To stay home that day / Why did Sharon stay away?" Okay, yes, a little raw, a little outré—but isn't that the *whole point* of art?

Courage. Candor. Frankness. It's that sort of time. Nothing low or dishonest about *this* decade, at least so far. Plain people speaking plain truths about the world they see around them and, more, about their very own selves. That is the way it is now, especially in New Jersey, where Mr. Baraka does not stand alone in his penchant for soul-searing self-appraisal.

"In public life if you actually seek more than satisfaction for yourself in the things you achieve, you will always be frustrated," admitted the too-honest-for-his-own-good Senator Robert C. Torricelli, as he announced that he was abandoning his bid for re-election. Polls showed his relative standing plummeting after the release of government papers revealing that federal prosecutors who had declined to indict him did, in fact, believe he was guilty of accepting illegal gifts—this following a savage admonition by the Senate Ethics Committee. "Somewhere today," Torricelli said, "in one of several hospitals in New Jersey, some woman's life is going to be changed because of the mammography centers that I created for thousands of women. Somewhere tonight in Bergen County, if a woman is beaten, [if] she fears for her child, she'll spend the night in a center that I created for abused children so they can be safe ... Some child in Bergen County will play in a park that I funded and land that I saved. Somewhere all over New Jersey some senior citizen who doesn't even know my name and nothing about what we're doing today will live at a senior center that I helped to build. That's my life. Don't feel badly for me. I changed people's lives ... I've done my duty for my country."



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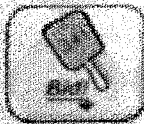
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SHIFT passion

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But why should it all be give, give, give? Can't there be even a little room for some take, take, take? As the senator so unflinchingly asked, "When did we become such an unforgiving people?" You spend a lifetime truckling to the shrieking demands of blue-rinsed bats, and toothless Veterans of Foreign Wars, and God knows who else—and you ask for nothing—nothing—in return, except an occasional Italian suit or Rolex or large-screen TV. And yet the bastards turn on you. And, anyway, did you ever claim to be perfect?

Well, sort of, alas. But that was then. We aren't like that anymore. We're all Torricellis now. We look at ourselves and we say the truth about what we see, warts and all. "I am a member of al Qaeda and I pledged to Osama bin Laden; I am an enemy of your country," said the British citizen Richard C. Reid (who has a fetchingly frank and candid and self-aware way of making his eyes big), pleading guilty to trying to shoe-bomb a jetliner. We admit our past errors and confusions. "I have never understood *jihad* to mean anti-Americanism or terrorism," said John Walker Lindh, on the occasion of his accepting twenty years in a federal penitentiary for his small role in the recent heavily armed misunderstanding known as the Taliban.

The old, pettifogging ways are gone even in the courts. Today's lawyers speak truth in the interests of justice. "It was a bad choice," acknowledged the attorney Steven Rosen, of his self-admittedly imperfect client Madelyne Gorman Toogood's decision to administer what appeared on a security video to be a vicious beating to her four-year-old daughter.

In diplomacy, too, the new way is blunt, fearless, damn the torpedoes. "I have nothing but hatred in my heart

for him," the former American President George H.W. Bush said of the man who tried to blow him up, Saddam Hussein. "I haven't seen him for a long time," French President Jacques Chirac said of the man he once called his "personal friend," Saddam Hussein, to whom he provided a nuclear reactor that he could never have guessed might be subverted to provide the Iraqi regime with the fissile material required in its very nearly successful effort to build a nuclear bomb. "He's probably changed since; so have I," added the fearless Frenchman, in what *The New York Times* called "a striking departure," although without saying from what, exactly.

In a related striking departure, and in today's spirit of truth-telling and self-awareness, North Korean officials acknowledged (after U.S. diplomats confronted the officials with powerful evidence, and after a no doubt merely reflexive spasm of denying everything) that, actually, North Korea, Iraq's personal axis-of-evil friend, was in fact—and not entirely in keeping with its assertions to the contrary under the 1994 agreement with the United States to abandon all nuclear weapons in exchange for light-water nuclear reactors and some fuel oil—conducting a major nuclear-weapons program. You might say

that this development suggests North Korea is not, alas, perfect—but (and this is what counts) *North Korea knows this about itself*. And it is not afraid to admit it. The heart thrills to live in such a time.

The new truth is everywhere in politics. In an unusually candid expression of its views, the Democratic National Committee put on its Web site an animated cartoon in which George W. Bush, saying "Trust me," shoves two people (one an old lady) in wheel-

chairs down a jagged slope meant to symbolize the falling stock market. Leading Republicans asserted, candidly, that they found this depiction of the President to be tasteless. The DNC spokeswoman Jennifer Palmieri explained, with equal candor, "It wasn't tasteless. It was amusing." You will notice that Ms. Palmieri made no claim that the cartoon was perfect—perfectly fair, perfectly fitting, perfectly appropriate, perfectly conducive to that climate of enlightened inquiry that Ms. Palmieri joins all political professionals in striving to foster. Ms. Palmieri admits, as we all do, the truth implied by the poet Baraka: politics is not perfect, alas. But if it is amusing, isn't that enough? When did we become such an unforgiving people?

"Why do [White House reporters] have to have everything spoon-fed ahead of time?" said the White House spokesman Ari Fleischer, in a moment of exemplary honesty that will surely be forgiven by a press corps that is always the first to admit its imperfections. "There's a tendency by reporters to wildly exaggerate the trauma they go through so they have better excuses for their editors for why they don't have a story."

George W. Bush has "a natural poise, like a ballet dancer," said an openly admiring Norman Mailer, who wrote a novel called *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, but who in the new spirit of the age is not afraid to honestly address his more intimate feelings for men in leotards. "Never before have I seen an American President who moves so gracefully before TV cameras. Everything he does seems to have been choreographed, even when he feeds his dog."

Bush as ballet dancer, Mailer as ballet critic, Fleischer as media critic, Torricelli as conscience of a nation, Baraka as state poet. Why, it is all perfect. And with 100 percent of the vote in Iraq counted, Saddam Hussein has won with 100 percent of the vote. Perfect. ▀

Michael Kelly is editor at large of The Atlantic.

Politics is not perfect, alas. But if it is amusing, isn't that enough? When did we become such an unforgiving people?

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LIGHT SHOWS OF THE MIND

Einstein was right when he said that imagination is more important than knowledge

Quick, what's the cube root of 487? Now, what door would you use to get out of the room you're sitting in? If your brain were a computer, you could answer the first question almost instantaneously but you would stumble around for minutes and minutes trying to solve the second one. As technologists have programmed computers and robots, they've learned that although computers can do some mental tasks well, they cannot do others that we thought were easy but turn out to be incredibly complex. Even sophisticated computers have trouble drawing analogies between the door in one room and the doors in all the other rooms they've encountered. Moreover, they have trouble with questions like What is this thing called a "door"? and What does it mean to go "out"?

When we human beings encounter a door, we recognize many of its aspects—its color, its shape, its heft, its texture, the dividing line between the door and the doorframe—but in different parts of our brain. There is no single spot where the brain brings all these apprehensions together. Yet through some intricate backstage process it does bind them. We have only the vaguest idea of how this happens.

And if a door is complicated for the brain, imagine how complex many analogies, metaphors, and concepts are. When we use the phrase "American dream," we blend all the things we mean by the word "America" and all the associations we have with dreaming, and we feel we know what we're talking about. Impressive.

We call this process the imagination. It turns out that imagination is not some airy-fairy quality that artists use to paint pictures. It's a faculty that's at work every second of every day. Without our permission, our imaginations range around connecting one set of perceptions to another. The imagination

builds fantasy landscapes and experiences and then moves into them to see what they're like. Some blends are nice: being alone together with Elle MacPherson on a tropical island. Some are horrible: my kids' being kidnapped. Regardless, what we imagine can arouse strong emotions and can power-

fully shape the way we think and behave. This is the point made effectively by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in their fascinating new book,

The Way We Think: Conceptual

Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities. "The next step in the study of mind," they write, "is the scientific study of the nature and mechanisms of the imagination."

I came upon this book through my semi-professional hobby of examining consumer behavior. Anybody who watches people as they shop quickly perceives that the economist's model of human behavior—in which we are rational actors calculating costs and benefits—doesn't really explain much. (Why do some people fall in love with Jaguars but not Corvettes?) Nor does Thorstein Veblen's model—in which consumers are involved in a status race to keep up with the Joneses. (Do you really think that's how you select your purchases? And if you don't, what makes you think everyone else is shallower and more status-crazed than you are?)

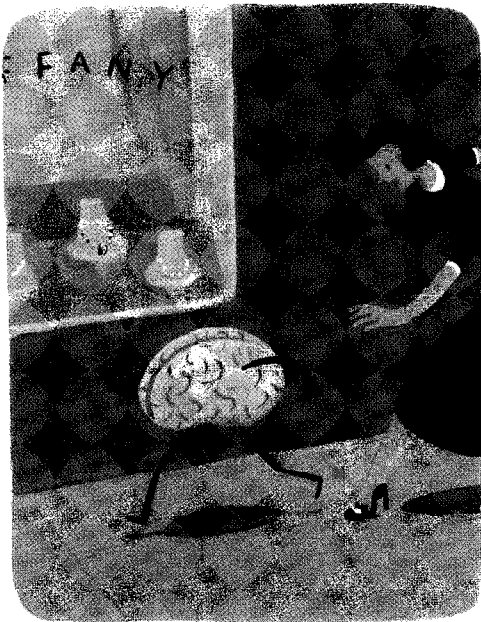
The key to consumption is not calculation or emulation. It's aspiration. The minds of shoppers relentlessly race ahead of reality. People tend to buy the things that set off light shows in their imaginations. But once an item ceases to fire their visions (because it no longer seems to provide a pathway to some idyllic future), they lose interest in it, and their imaginations go off in search of something new and exciting. Kids go through this process with dispiriting speed, as any parent can tell you on Christmas afternoon.

Reading Fauconnier and Turner as they summarize the literature on imagination and offer their own theories (Fauconnier is a professor of cognitive science at the University of California at San Diego, and Turner is a University Professor and a behavioral scientist at the University of Maryland), one realizes that we are only beginning to understand how imagination works. Still, they do offer a few significant insights. For example, they suggest that the culture we inhabit creates templates that they call "entrenched integration networks." In response to certain stimuli, people from the same culture tend to have similar responses. It took tens of thousands of years for language to develop, for instance, but children can learn it in a few years—and once the template is embedded in their brains, it is stubbornly entrenched. If you had seen the word "chair" when you were eighteen months old, you would have seen just a bunch of shapes. But now when you see those shapes you think of something to sit on. It is nearly impossible to go back and see the word "chair" as just shapes again. You cannot prevent your brain from making that blend.

"Cultures work hard," Fauconnier and Turner write, "to develop integration resources that can then be handed on with relative ease." Death is a terrifying prospect, but each culture comes up with a set of rituals to help the imagination get a handle on it. The figure of the Grim Reaper is a blend of several aspects of death—darkness, the harvest, bones, afterlife, and so on—put into graspable form. We treat corpses as sacred objects and develop rituals for their disposal because we need some physical way to organize our responses to the death of a loved one.

A crucial point here is that imagination is amphibious. It lives in the worlds of both reason and fantasy. It always seems to be pushing us toward some product or benefit. But it also ventures forth into make-believe landscapes and into the future, places where logic

IDEAS
**DAVID
BROOKS**



and calculation don't really help us.

For example, our imaginations trick us into undertaking difficult tasks. We decide to learn a language, renovate our house, move to a new town, have children, or begin writing a book. We envision the pleasure and satisfaction we will feel and the success we will achieve. Then those tasks turn out to be hard, and the difficulties we encounter bring out our best exertions and make us better people. If our imaginations hadn't deceived us with glorious visions, we might never have started that book or that renovation, made that move, or begun that language course in the first place.

Imagination is also amphibious because it blends the material and the spiritual. Sometimes people say they are going to renounce materialism in order to lead more spiritual lives. That's not actually what they're doing. Most of them are really trading in a set of material objects (with the imaginative sparks those objects inspire) for another set of objects (which inspire, one hopes, more-profound imaginative sparks). Shopping, like living, is an imaginative activity in which it isn't possible to draw a sensible distinction between the spiritual and the material.

Fauconnier and Turner, and the other scientists whose work they summarize, expend the vast bulk of their energy trying to trace the pathways that imagination uses to perform its func-

tions. I confess I find some of their intricate dissections baffling. But what they have done is to uncover a function of the brain and show its remarkable richness and complexity. After reading their book I'm more convinced than ever that Einstein was right when he said imagination is more important than knowledge—and I'm also more convinced that imagination is not the foggy New Age gift from the spirits that pottery instructors describe.

Imagination is a propelling and sometimes cruel force. Entrepreneurs launch high-risk enterprises because their imaginations urge them on with rich fantasies of future companies and their contributions to the world. Very often the enterprises fail. Immigrants often come to this country woefully unprepared for what they will find here. Yet their imaginations have held up the dream of life in America, and they can't bear to lead lives that are unenlivened by anticipation, so off they go. I suspect that many Americans, including George W. Bush, are irritated by the fact that whole stretches of the planet are not democratic. The American imagination envisions an empire of liberty, and the current state of the world seems radically unfulfilled.

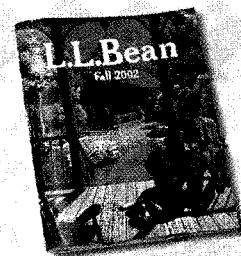
When the great American historian Francis Parkman was a young man, he was inflamed by a mystical longing for the West. Writing from middle age about his young self, he observed, "His thoughts were always in the forest, whose features possessed his waking and sleeping dreams, filling him with vague cravings impossible to satisfy." In fact, we all live with our thoughts always in the forest of the future; we are filled with vague cravings, and are finally impelled to wander amid the trees to find our destiny there. ▀

David Brooks, an Atlantic correspondent, is also a contributing editor of Newsweek, a senior editor of The Weekly Standard, and a political analyst for The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer. His most recent book is Bobos in Paradise (2000).

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THE FAT TAX

A modest proposal

In September, McDonald's announced plans to cook its fries in healthier oil. And not a moment too soon. Just a few days later the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that in 2000 (the latest year for which final figures are available) the death rate in America, adjusted for the fact that the population is aging, reached an all-time low. Not only that, but life expectancy reached an all-time high, of about seventy-seven years. Obviously, those numbers can mean only one thing: America is in the grip of a gigantic public-health crisis. To wit—an obesity epidemic!

That America is marching fatward seems not to be in doubt. Obesity has risen substantially in recent years, to 31 percent of adults, according to the most recent data from the National Center for Health Statistics. Soft-drink cups are bigger, restaurant portions are larger, and health campaigns condemning fatty foods have persuaded people, wrongly, that they can eat twice as much bread as before, provided that they cut down on the butter. Also not in doubt is that other things being equal, being blubbery is not good. Still, one cannot help scratching one's head. If Americans are living longer, and if they are dying less (so to speak), and if, as the CDC reports, the proportion rating their own health as excellent or very good has remained at a solid 69 percent for the past five years, what exactly is the problem?

Call me oversensitive, but I think I detect a hint of snobbery in the national anti-fat drive. More than occasionally I read things like a recent article from the online *Bully Magazine*, which was headlined "AMERICA: LAND OF THE FAT, DRUNKEN SLOBS." The author, one Ken Wohlrob, writes, "We're quickly becoming a society of sloths who spend their free hours driving around in SUVs and staring at televisions or computer monitors ... Goddamn, as if we need more fat,

bloated people in America." Do I sniff a trace of condescension here? In the September issue of *The Atlantic* a letter writer named Ken Weiss pointedly (and wrongly) mentioned that "more than 50 percent of our population is obese" amid a list of ways in which America is inferior to Europe, beginning with

our shorter vacations, continuing through our lack of a national health plan, and ending, inevitably, with our "polluting SUVs." It's not just that Americans are fat, appar-

ently. It's that Americans are the kind of people who *would* be fat, in the kind of country that would encourage their piggishness.

What is to be done? The letters pages of magazines are often good places to preview the great bad ideas of tomorrow, and recently three letters in *The New Republic* offered a peek. The first, co-signed by the executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest and an academic nutritionist, said that the government should "slap small taxes on junk foods like soft drinks" to generate money for public-health campaigns. The next letter, from someone with the Center for the Advancement of Public Health, in Washington, D.C., said, "No one is suggesting the creation of a refrigerator police, but so long as the government is spending \$360 billion per year at the federal level on health through Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program, the government's interest in trying to prevent needless illness and death from obesity is kind of simple." The third letter came from a professor of public-interest law who wrote that he had helped to sue McDonald's for "failing to disclose the fat content of its French fries." He warned that more such suits could be on the way. "As with smoking," he wrote, "health advocates may increasingly be forced"—forced?—"to turn to the courts if legislatures continue to do little or nothing about the problem."

If obesity really is such a big crisis, I want to suggest a different approach, because the ones above seem deficient. For one thing, snack taxes that pay for public-health campaigns, and lawsuits against food companies, seem pretty likely to fatten the wallets of the people advocating them—public-health activists and lawyers—without necessarily making anyone any thinner. Besides, most people snack sensibly, so why should they pay to harangue lazy gluttons? And I know of no conclusive evidence that people are fat because food companies fail to disclose that fries and bacon cheeseburgers are fattening.

It seems to me that the only honest and effective way to confront this issue is to tax not fattening foods or fattening companies but fat people. It is they, after all, who drive up the government's health-care costs, so it is they who should pay. What I propose, then, is to tax people by the pound.

This needn't be very complicated. Fat-tax rates would be set by a National Avoirdupois Governing System (NAGS). To hit the worst offenders the hardest, the tax could be graduated. People would pay one per-pound rate above the "overweight" threshold, and a stiffer rate above the "obese" threshold. Fat people might not like this tax, but of course they could avoid it by becoming thinner.

In fact, I might go further. Carrots often work even better than sticks, so I propose a skinny subsidy to complement the fat tax. People who maintain trim, firm physiques should be rewarded for their public-spiritedness with large tax credits—funded, of course, by the fat tax.

My plan would address the nation's fat epidemic equitably and efficiently. It would make Americans put their money where their mouths are. And did I mention that I weigh 135 pounds? ■

Jonathan Rauch is a correspondent for The Atlantic and a senior writer for National Journal.

SOCIETY
**JONATHAN
RAUCH**

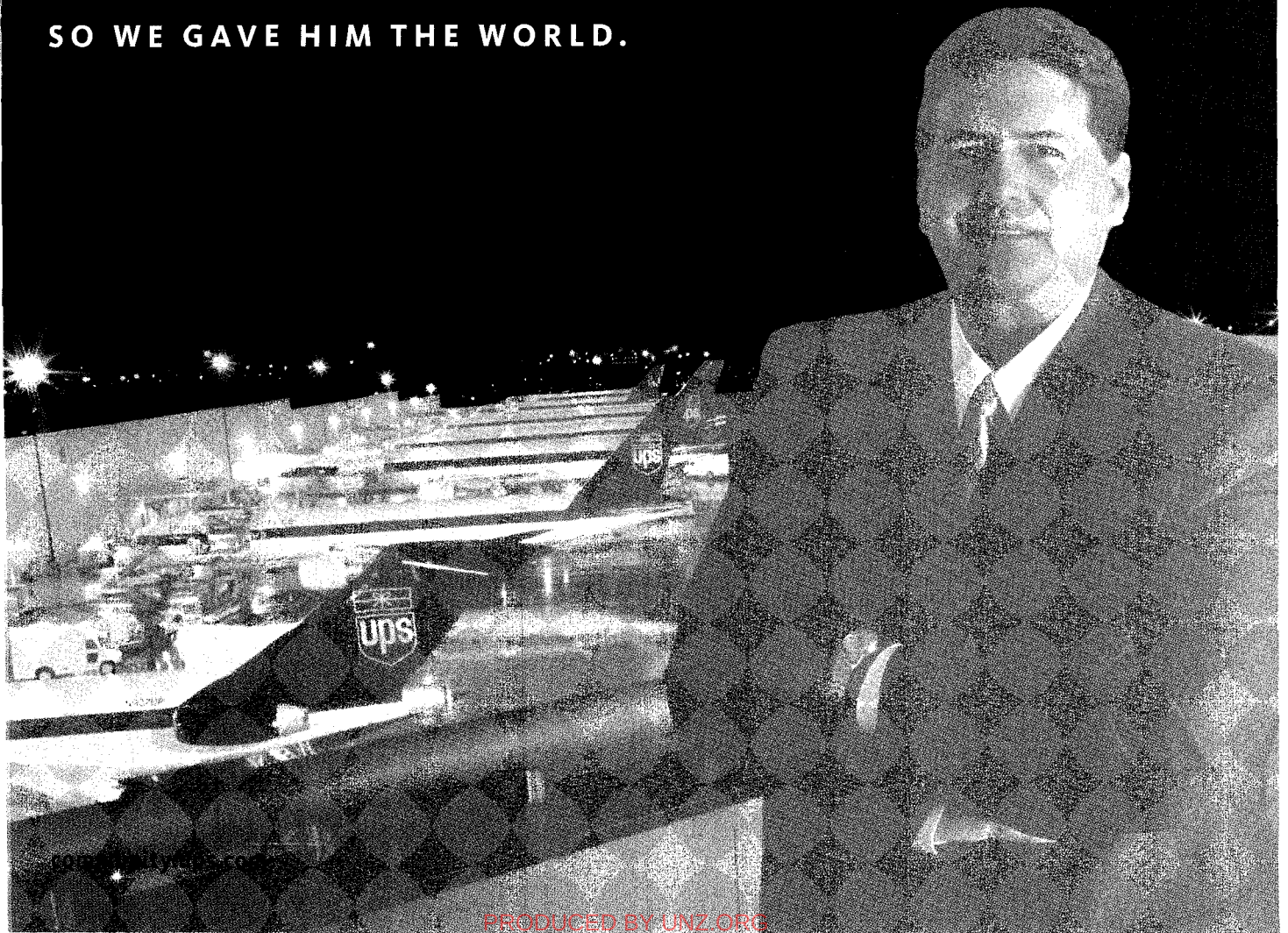
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THIRD PERSON SINGULAR

Having an ear bent by Henry Adams, the prototype of the modern thinker

I was looking for an old quotation, something to the effect of "Political office should be held only by men who don't want it." I thought this was from *The Education of Henry Adams*, which I remembered as being a trenchant criticism of politics, as pertinent today as when it was written, in 1905. I got out my copy, unopened since college—and maybe unopened then, if Monarch Notes were available. ("Trenchant criticism ... as pertinent today ..." certainly sounds like Monarch Notes.) I began to skim, became fascinated, and actually read the thing.

The Education of Henry Adams is not so much a criticism of politics as a catalogue of political feelings. Adams had a lot of them. Adams shared his feelings. He honored his feelings. He cared. Pertinent today, indeed, Adams's politics were as deeply felt as those of the deepest and most feeling of contemporary persons who feel things deeply. (Phil Donahue comes to mind.)

During the Civil War the author's father, Charles Francis Adams, was Lincoln's Minister to England. Charles Francis made a brilliant, long-fought, and ultimately successful effort to prevent British intervention on the Confederate side. Henry was his dad's private secretary, went to dinner parties with London's pro-Southern bon ton, and made an effort of his own—"the effort of facing a hostile society ... when one is exasperated, furious, bitter and choking with tears over the blunders and incapacity of one's Government." So strong were Adams's emotions that when news of Gettysburg arrived in London and Adams was publicly hugged by a Union supporter, he was not embarrassed although he was from Boston. "That evening, for the first time in his life, he happened not to be thinking of himself."

The Education of Henry Adams is written in the third person, a voice that gives dignity to that character; much in vogue these days, the self. It recounts

sixty years of Henry Adams's being frustrated—and aren't we all?—with politics. The book begins with boyhood frustrations at Boston State House intrigues. "Politics ... had always been the systematic organization of hatreds, and Massachusetts politics had been as harsh as the climate." It climaxes with

frustration at everyone. "Had the Czar and the Kaiser and the Mikado turned school-masters ... he would still have known nothing. They knew nothing themselves."

Set at the end of the volume are three chapters on a theory of history impenetrable enough for a current graduate seminar. Adams estimated that history would end approximately now, in time for Francis Fukuyama—although he didn't believe that the final credits would roll over a protracted romantic kiss. (But maybe Fukuyama doesn't believe this either anymore.) And, also pertinent today, Adams claimed that "every American who lived into the year 2000 would know how to control unlimited power." I checked my stock portfolio of two years ago and found that Adams had been exactly right. My broker swears Adams will be right again.

I had gone to consult an antique censor of political ills and had discovered the prototype of the modern thinker.

Henry Adams thought many of the good thoughts that good moderns think today. He was willing to put aside the fact that he was a rich man to make bold attacks on business: "The Trusts and Corporations ... were obnoxious because of their vigorous and unscrupulous energy." He belittled material progress: "Prosperity never before imagined ... had made the world irritable, nervous, querulous, unreasonable and afraid." His notions of economics had a fuzzy modernism. He went, guided by his feelings, from the idea that the value of money should be based on gold to the idea that it should be based on silver (the fully modern idea that

the value of money should be based on nothing not yet having occurred to anyone). And Adams thought that the high-tech revolution would change everything: "Wireless telegraphy or airships might require the reconstruction of society."

In the early 1900s Adams wrote to his closest friend, John Hay, then the Secretary of State, "I incline now to anti-imperialism, and very strongly to anti-militarism." Adams believed that the right people could make a difference in government. He said, in *The Education*, "As for Adams, all his hopes of success in life turned on his finding an administration to support." The Administration on which all his hopes had once turned was President Ulysses S. Grant's.

Henry Adams lived a hundred years ago. He was not a perfectly modern thinker. He was prematurely post-feminist and wrote that woman's "axis of rotation had been the cradle and the family," adding that "if her force were to be diverted from its axis, it must find a new field, and the family must pay for it." In a letter to a friend expressing support for Third World self-determination, Adams's language lacked sensitivity: "As I rather prefer niggers to whites ... I incline to make the most of the tropics while the white is still tolerated there." Adams loathed trade unions. However, if we recall how the good thinkers felt about union members who voted for Ronald Reagan, we won't be hard on him for that. And Adams was an anti-Semite. He wrote to his friend Elizabeth Cameron, "The Jew has got into the soul. I see him—or her—now everywhere, and wherever he—or she—goes, there must remain a taint in the blood forever." But maybe even the virtuous moderns of today have gross prejudices to which they are as yet blind.

What truly makes Henry Adams the prototype of the modern thinker is that he was the first thoroughly educated, widely read, highly intelligent American who didn't know what to think. He moved from theory to theory. "By rights," Adams wrote of himself, "he should

AT LARGE
**P.J.
O'ROURKE**

have been also a Marxist, but some narrow trait of the New England nature seemed to blight socialism, and he tried in vain to make himself a convert. He did the next best thing; he became a Comteist." Auguste Comte was the man who invented sociology.

Adams gave ample space in *The Education* to his struggle with the philosophical question of whether the universe was an organic whole—a rational totality guided by purpose—or just a mess. Life, Time, People—were they a "unity," or were they a "multiplicity," or were they unwisely merged with America Online, causing a stock-market disaster and wrecking everybody's 401(k)? The philosophy departments at today's universities have gone far beyond this in exquisite refinements of puzzled thought. But with Henry Adams we see the moment when the pronouncements of philosophers ceased to be greeted with forehead slaps of recognition or shouts of "Heretic!" and began to be met with mumbles of "Oh, shut up."

Adams searched for an equation that would explain the whole world—when he believed in that world. "Except as reflected in himself," he said, "man has no reason for assuming ... an ultimate substance." Two years before Einstein published his special theory of relativity, Adams wrote, "Motion seems to be Matter and Matter seems to be Motion." But then he went on to write, "The motion of thought had the same value as the motion of a cannonball seen approaching the observer on a direct line through the air." One would rather be struck by a thought—even a very bad thought, such as "I'll bet my wife would like a leaf blower for our anniversary."

Adams, being a modern, was of course atheistic. This led, as it usually seems to do, to a great deal of metaphysical speculation, and to an investigation—then novel, now predictable—of Eastern religions. Adams once called himself a "Unitarian mystic." Unitarians are a denomination whose adherents



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are famous for not knowing quite what to think. Perhaps Adams reached satori, emptied his mind of all thought, and then didn't know what to think about it.

Henry Adams was also the inventor of the Whiny Loser memoir. He achieved this in spite of the handicap of having—as he himself proclaimed—very little to whine about. There was nothing of Morticia, Pugsley, Lurch, or Uncle Fester in his Adams family. Henry's great-grandfather, John Adams, was the second President of the United States, and the man who made the speech that persuaded the delegates of the thirteen Colonies to issue the Declaration of Independence. Henry's grandfather, John Quincy Adams, was also President, and, later, a lonely force for the anti-slavery cause in the House of Representatives. Charles Francis Adams was the most important American diplomat of the nineteenth century. And Henry's second cousin three times removed was the effervescent Boston patriot (and bottled beer) Sam Adams. Henry Adams was the Andrew Cuomo of his clan.

Or worse. He never held even appointive office. He was an author. He wrote *Life of Albert Gallatin* (not much read today), *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* (not much read today), a biography of John Randolph (not much read today), the 2,700-page *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* (called "magisterial," which is bibliographic shorthand for "nobody's ever read it"), and the anonymous novel *Democracy*, the *Primary Colors* of its time. But Henry Adams never loudly announced his anonymity, the way Joe Klein did. The secret of his authorship was kept until he died. *Democracy* is said to be very good, for a Washington novel.

But then there is Adams's literary breakthrough, *The Education*. Adams brought modernity to egotism. All through history successful personages have been seduced by self-love. However, with the advent of the present

era's fully uninhibited, nonjudgmental attitude toward loving, a failed self could be so embraced. Admittedly, Adams did not use a modern technique to produce his modern memoir. He failed to include everything you never wanted to hear about him. He left out not only his wife's suicide but his entire wife. In order to have any idea of what's going on in *The Education*, one must read other books: *Henry Adams*, by Ernest Samuels, and *America's First Dynasty: The Adamses, 1735–1918*, by Richard



Brookhiser. But the modern-memoir effect was achieved nonetheless.

Until *The Education of Henry Adams*, a memoir told us the great things that a great personage knew, and gave us the play-by-play in the championship game that was his or her life. Adams, however, admitted at the outset of *The Education* that he "never got to the point of playing the game." As for knowledge, he said of himself at age sixty-four, "the pursuit of ignorance . . . had, by this time, led the weary pilgrim into such mountains of ignorance that he could no longer see any path whatever, and could not even understand a signpost."

Men and women whose mode of thought is old-fashioned and who don't feel things any more deeply than they have to are left agape—the men wondering, "Why am I reading this?" the women wondering, "Why didn't he stop and ask for directions?" Meanwhile,

modern thinkers have filled the *New York Times* best-seller list with this very kind of memoir.

The superficial, insensitive reader, out of date in his cogitation, finds *The Education of Henry Adams* a handy stick with which to thrash the modern. Or he does until he realizes that he, too, has begun to talk about himself in the third person and also has been unable to put down the book.

There are rich globules of nasty fat in the mortadella of Henry Adams's writing. These wouldn't appeal to an audience of modern thinkers, careful about the calories in their mental diets. "The Senate is much given to admiring in its members a superiority less obvious or quite invisible to outsiders." "Every friend in power is a friend lost." "Practical politics consists in ignoring facts." Of practical politics Adams also said, "No one in his experience had ever passed unscathed through that malarious marsh." He detailed the symptoms of political fever, for which there is still no cure: "the distortion of sight—the warping of mind—the degradation of tissue—the coarsening of taste—the narrowing of sympathy to the emotions of a caged rat."

Reading Samuels and Brookhiser, it's clear that Adams believed the world had been going to hell and might have gotten there. In 1909 Adams wrote a pamphlet, *A Letter to American Teachers of History*, which he described as "a scientific demonstration that Socialism, Collectivism, Humanitarianism, Universalism, Philanthropism, and every other ism, has come, and is the End, and there is nothing possible beyond, and they can all go play, and on the whole, base-ball is best."

Adams turned against the political liberalism of his youth. In his seventies he claimed to have an "insane antipathy to reform, and to virtue of every social variety." And even as a young man he had been skeptical of some of the national liberations and nation-buildings

THE AT-RISK-YOUTH INDUSTRY

Private companies that run prisons and treatment centers for juveniles have turned out not to be very good at making money or rehabilitating kids

In August of 2000 the National Center for Children in Poverty, at Columbia University, released a study showing that despite the country's recent economic boom, 13 million American children were living in poverty—three million more than in 1979. For most Americans that was unsettling news, but for a small group of publicly traded companies it represented an opportunity. As the ranks of children living in poverty have grown during the past two decades, so have the ranks of juveniles filing through the nation's dependency and delinquency courts, typically landing in special-education programs, psychiatric-treatment centers, orphanages, and juvenile prisons. These were formerly run almost exclusively by nonprofit and public agencies. In the mid-1990s, however, a number of large, multi-state for-profit companies emerged to form what Wall Street soon termed the "at-risk-youth industry."

The financial incentives were compelling. In 1997 SunTrust Equitable Securities, one of the nation's leading investment firms, published a forty-five-page report titled "At-Risk Youth ... A Growth Industry," which estimated that annual public spending on youth services amounted to \$50 billion. The report appeared shortly after Congress passed the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, which included a provision allowing for-profit companies to tap into child-welfare funds that had previously been reserved largely for nonprofit agencies.

The SunTrust report documented an array of disquieting social trends—including rising numbers of children living with single parents and in working-poor families—that from the industry's perspective sounded like good news. "Not only has the raw number of abused and neglected children increased," SunTrust observed, "but ... the rate of children reported as abused and neglected has increased from 28 per 1,000 children in 1984 to 43 per 1,000 in 1993." A

diagram titled the "Privatization Spectrum" showed how companies could profit as children cycled "from the schoolhouse to the jailhouse," passing through one publicly funded, privately run facility after another. Arrows marked the flow of kids to companies offering programs in special education (a \$32 billion market), child welfare (\$12–\$15 billion), and juvenile justice (\$3.5 billion). No arrows indicated how these children might one day exit the system and lead ordinary lives.

Today, five years after the release of the SunTrust report, the prospects for the at-risk-youth industry are less rosy. Claims that contracting out social services would improve efficiency and lower costs have not panned out—and the projected windfalls for private contractors have failed to materialize. Many state and local governments, however, continue to entrust social services to profit-driven companies. Examining the records of some of the industry's leaders highlights the substantial social costs of doing so.

Consider the Pahokee Youth Development Center, a 350-bed facility for "moderate-risk" youth, set on the northern edge of the Everglades and opened, in 1997, by Correctional Services Corporation, one of the nation's largest at-risk-youth companies. James Slattery, CSC's co-founder and CEO, promised that the facility would save taxpayers money while turning out "reformed, treated youths." But in 1998 an independent monitor assigned by the state found inadequate staff training and insufficient medical services, and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice's inspector general confirmed numerous cases in which staff members had used "unnecessary and improper force" against youths.

CSC—which denied requests for interviews—seemed more interested in finding creative ways to maximize revenue than in rehabilitating kids. Although

the state paid the company some \$2.5 million a year to provide education, Pahokee failed to maintain proper student records, and for several weeks in the 1998 school year it held no classes whatsoever. A company document has revealed that CSC intentionally delayed the release of ten juveniles so as to maintain the head count, which determined payment. The following year, after Pahokee failed its second state quality-assurance review, CSC canceled its contract, and the facility was taken over by another company.

Children's Comprehensive Services is another case in point. CCS grew out of a Tennessee-based prison company named Prisor, which in 1994 was \$10 million in debt. Five years later, in 1999, when CCS was at its peak, it had programs in fourteen states and annual revenues of \$115 million. William J. Ballard, the company's CEO and the man largely responsible for the turnaround, is a businessman who specialized in mergers and acquisitions and came to CCS with, he says, "no background in treatment or education" of children. In 1998, at a CCS psychiatric-treatment center in Montana, two suicides and three attempted suicides occurred within fifteen days; allegations in a lawsuit brought by the State of Montana attributed the deaths to chronic understaffing, which investigations by three outside agencies seemed to support. (Children on suicide alert were left unsupervised.) Understaffing and low pay are common cost-cutting techniques among for-profit providers of social services, for whom staff salaries are by far the largest expense.

Ramsay Youth Services, based in Coral Gables, Florida, began as a chain of psychiatric hospitals. Luis Lamela, the president and CEO, is a businessman who worked for Florida's first licensed health-maintenance organization. The one thing Ramsay will never do, Lamela told us in an interview, is warehouse kids—yet he also spoke about Ramsay's clients in language that might startle children's advocates. "It's

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a product-to-market approach," he explained. "We view everything as a product." He then opened a binder he called the "product-market matrix," in which charts displayed sex-offender programs, psychiatric-treatment centers, and other Ramsay services, all cross-listed with states where a rising demand for these services has been projected. Treating neglected children, Lamela said, is essentially no different from manufacturing widgets.

To be sure, problems in the youth-services field are by no means confined to the private sector. In both the mental-health and juvenile-justice fields, in fact, it was government's failure

tion, contracts were awarded mostly to nonprofit and mom-and-pop organizations, many of which pioneered small, local programs in which staff members could develop close relationships with youths. Not until the 1990s did large, multi-state, for-profit companies—some, such as Wackenhut and Correctional Corporation of America, having earlier cut their teeth in the adult prison industry—become major players in the bidding process. They were enticed, in part, by the per diems attached to juveniles, which are higher than those for adults. (Juveniles are eligible for rehabilitative services such as education and mental health.)

When assessing the strength of these

ment. According to Barry Krisberg, the president of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, a substantial body of evidence shows that smaller programs are more conducive to rehabilitation. One NCCD study found that youths from Massachusetts, a state that runs mostly small-scale programs, had lower rates of recidivism than youths from California, which relies heavily on large institutions. In 2000 an array of leading advocacy groups, including the National Urban League and the American Youth Policy Forum, issued a report calling for a shift in resources away from large-scale, prisonlike facilities and toward community-based, early-stage treatment and prevention programs. "Along with large facilities comes too few staff for too many kids," Krisberg says. "Administrators start to resort to stringent security measures—shakedowns, lockdowns—and the facility starts to look and feel like a prison ... There's a replication of the conflicts in the streets."

Not only can privatization lead to abuses but it doesn't even necessarily save money. In Alabama, for example, after a 1993 federal court order required that the state improve rehabilitative services for juvenile delinquents, the Department of Youth Services quickly turned to the private sector. Among the companies that won contracts were Ramsay, CCS, and an Alabama-based company named Three Springs. Henry Mabry, the state's finance director at the time, told us that he first grew suspicious in 1999, when the DYS, whose budget nearly tripled from 1993 to 1998, approached him with a request for \$24 million in supplemental funding over the next two years. Shocked at the amount of the request, Mabry examined the contracts and discovered not only that empty beds were available in less costly, state-run facilities but also that there were huge disparities in funding rates: some providers, including CCS, were being paid as much as \$142 a day per child, whereas others received less than \$70.



to provide adequate care that paved the way for privatization: a series of class-action lawsuits in the 1970s and 1980s forced states to shut down many abusive government-run mental-health institutions, and the 1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act provided states with federal funding to develop community-based treatment services as an alternative to incarceration with adults. A small contracting empire arose in response, with millions of dollars made available to private providers of services. During this first wave of privatiza-

tion, Wall Street analysts have focused not on treatment methods or philosophy but on capacity. Investment reports highlight each company's recent acquisitions, referred to as "wins," and tally up the number of new "beds/slots." Although some companies do run a variety of smaller programs, industry leaders admit to a preference for large facilities. "I look at it in terms of size," Luis Lamela says. "What we look for is the achievement of economies of scale."

The trouble is that large-scale institutions rarely offer individualized treat-

Almost every private contract issued by Alabama's Department of Youth Services from 1994 to 1998 was awarded without any request for proposals or competitive bids; state records show that Ramsay, CCS, and Three Springs were all clients of the Bloom Group, a powerful Montgomery lobbying firm. And James Dupree, who had been the director of the DYS during the peak period of privatization, became a lobbyist for Bloom shortly after leaving public office, in September of 1998.

CCS was at one point even paid to provide services for children in Alabama who were never under its care: in 1998 a CCS boot camp served an average monthly population of 10.66 children but was paid a flat rate to serve forty. In February of 1999 the Regional Alliance 4 Children, an umbrella group of children's advocates and judges in southern Alabama, learned of this from an internal DYS memo indicating that the department had doubled the program's funding despite a history of problems, including poor staff training and psychological abuse of children. The author of the memo, a monitor named Alan Dodson, expressed disbelief that the state was allotting CCS additional funding, given that during the previous year CCS had served barely a quarter of the children it was paid to serve. Judge Charles Fleming, a member of the Regional Alliance, found the increase particularly baffling in view of the fact that Pathway, a local family-owned program with an excellent reputation, was on the brink of closing for lack of funds. Fleming and other prominent children's advocates, including Sue Bell Cobb, an Alabama judge who chairs the Children First Foundation, say that, unfortunately, Mabry and the current administration failed to clean up the DYS bidding process, depriving Alabama of much needed programs for at-risk youth.

Such problems arise in state after state. As Elliott Sclar, a professor of urban planning at Columbia, points out in his book *You Don't Always Get What You Pay*

For: The Economics of Privatization (2000), states often fail to conduct internal cost assessments to determine what private contractors should be paid, even though there is clear evidence that companies frequently tailor their bids to accord with such assessments. Many states also invest inadequately in monitoring.

Monitoring youth services has become especially challenging in recent years, because in the mid-1990s government agencies began shipping juveniles across state lines. In 1999 Florence Simcoe, a former clinical director at Century HealthCare, which operated treatment centers for mentally disturbed children in Phoenix, told the *Chicago Tribune* that she marketed her company's services to officials in Illinois. At-risk children, she said, were "bodies that we got \$300 a day for." Barry Krisberg highlights the problem. "We have less regulation of the interstate commerce in troubled kids than of meat products," he says.

If the track records of both government and for-profit providers are unimpressive, how should we care for our troubled young people? A visit we paid to Youth Environmental Services, a residential treatment program in Hillsborough County, Florida, suggests one path.

YES is a thirty-five-bed facility operated by Associated Marine Institutes, one of the oldest nonprofits in the juvenile-justice field. It houses kids who are moderate-risk offenders—the same category as those assigned to Pahoekie when Correctional Services Corporation ran the facility. Unlike many other juvenile-delinquent programs, YES has no fences or locked doors. "I've been in facilities where just to man the security devices—watching cameras, unlocking doors—takes twenty-five employees," Bob Weaver, the head of AMI, says. "We achieve security at our programs by investing in people and keeping staff levels high." YES has one staff member for every three youths. AMI runs numerous other

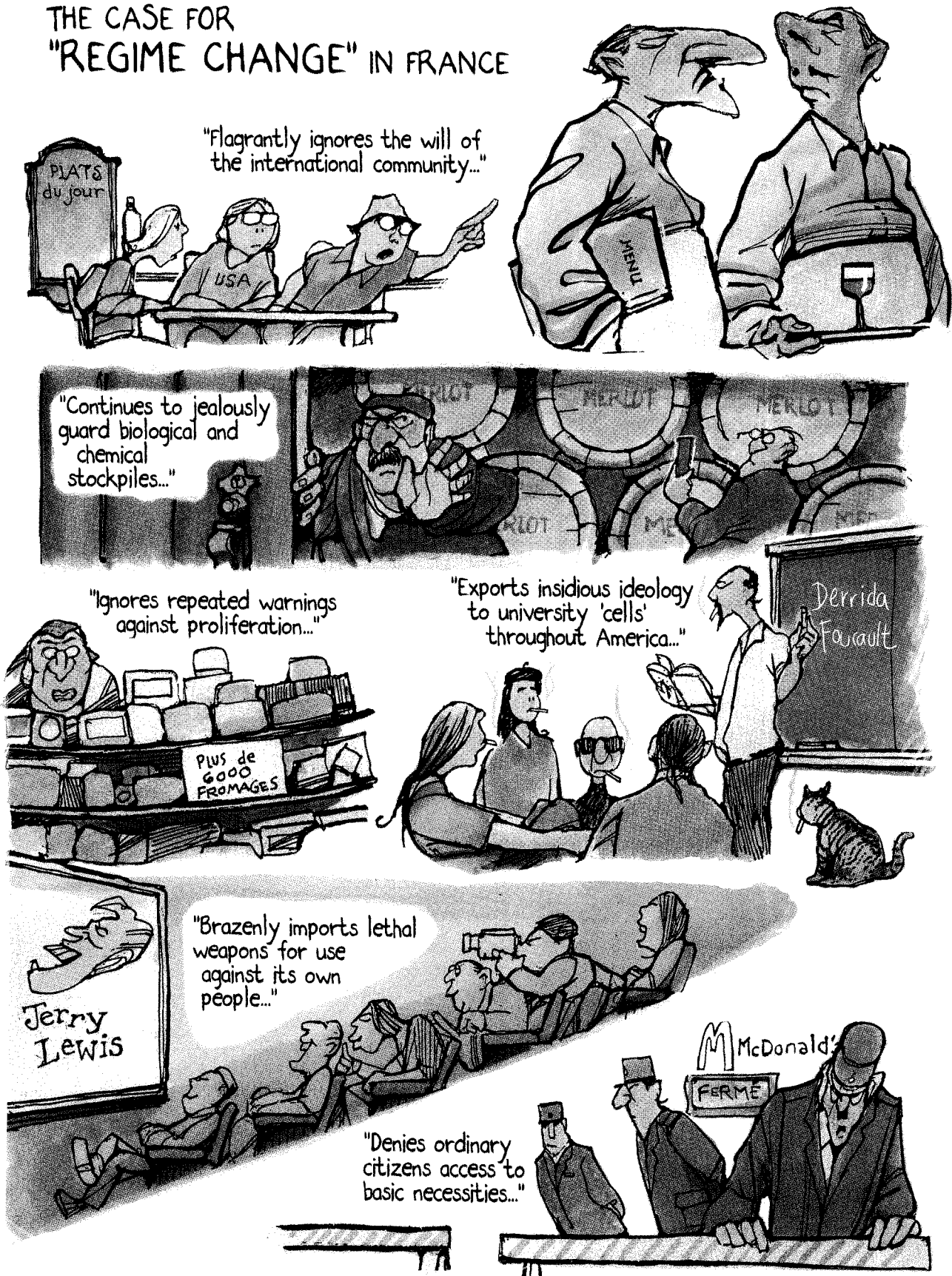
programs along the same model, with intensive staffing, no fences, and an emphasis on rehabilitation. AMI's YES program ranked near the middle of the pack in a 2001 study by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, which analyzed costs and recidivism rates; six of AMI's other programs ranked among the top ten most effective in the state.

Back in the early, heady days of the at-risk-youth industry, it seemed likely that nonprofit providers would soon be forced out of business. Their inability to obtain capital from investors or to lobby lawmakers (because of their tax-exempt status) appeared to place them at a competitive disadvantage. But nonprofits have resources that for-profits do not—volunteers, charitable donations, freedom from investors' demands. Although some nonprofit and mom-and-pop providers have engaged in abuse and profiteering of their own, in general they have a stronger commitment to community-based rehabilitation programs than their for-profit counterparts. In many cases, too, nonprofits have grown out of the same communities as the kids they serve. This can motivate them to ride out economic downturns, and they can maintain services without having to worry about quarterly earning reports.

Five years ago Wall Street had almost limitless hopes for the at-risk-youth industry, but times have changed. Although all but one of the at-risk-youth companies we spoke with in our initial research are still in operation (the exception is CCS, which was bought out in January of 2002 and is now part of Keys Group Holding), their profits have stagnated, their stock prices have fallen, and current prospects for growth are uncertain. The problem, according to Bob Weaver, is a basic one: "There just isn't enough money in serving these kids to deliver quality and still turn a profit." ▀

Eyal Press is a freelance writer. Jennifer Washburn is a fellow at the New America Foundation. Both are former fellows at the Open Society Institute.

THE CASE FOR "REGIME CHANGE" IN FRANCE



WHILE WE'RE AT IT ... by Jeff Danziger

PRIMARY SOURCES

Selections from recent reports, studies, and other documents. This month: Round 3,617 in the "media bias" debate; the world view of college freshmen; teenagers and virginity; why politics is a terrible investment

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Deployment in Forty-five Minutes

When the UN weapons inspectors left Iraq, in 1998, they were unable to account for 300 tons of chemicals used exclusively in the production of the nerve agent VX (ten milligrams of which can cause death upon contact with the skin). Also missing was enough material to create 25,000 liters of anthrax spores. Tony Blair's recently issued "Iraq Dossier"—based on British intelligence assessments, and made public in order to bolster support for military action against Iraq—asserts that the weapons-production infrastructure remains intact. Iraq could deploy chemical and biological weapons within forty-five minutes of Saddam's (or, apparently, his son's) order to do so.

☞ *While UNSCOM found a number of technical manuals (so called "cook books") for the production of chemical agents and critical precursors, Iraq's claim to have unilaterally destroyed the bulk of the documentation cannot be confirmed and is almost certainly untrue. Recent intelligence indicates that Iraq is still discussing methods of concealing such documentation in order to ensure that it is not discovered by any future UN inspections ... The authority to use chemical and biological weapons ultimately resides with Saddam but intelligence indicates that he may have also delegated this authority to his son Qusai.*

—"Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction" (www.number-10.gov.uk/files/pdf/iraq_dossier.pdf)

A War That Never Ends

One of the more heated topics in the "blogosphere"—the netherworld of online punditry that exists somewhere above the *Drudge Report* and somewhere below journalism—has been whether *The New York Times's* coverage of the Iraq debate has been biased. The discussion went white-hot when the *Times* published a strange "editor's note" in which it conceded (sort of,

weeks after the fact) that it had inaccurately characterized the stance Henry Kissinger took in an op-ed article as being one of opposition to war. Now begins Round 3,617 in the larger media-bias debate, prompted by a study of the *Times* and of network news by the Center for Media and Public Affairs. In front-page news stories about Iraq (the study contends) sources cited by *Times* reporters were critical of Bush's policies 71 percent of the time. Among the networks, ABC's sources evaluated Bush Administration policy negatively 80 percent of the time, NBC's 76 percent of the time, and CBS's 56 percent of the time. Of course, such findings will settle nothing. Hawks (especially those on the Bernard Goldberg–Ann Coulter right) will cite the statistics as evidence of the media's liberal bias. Doves (especially those on the Susan Sontag–Noam Chomsky left) will cite them as evidence that the media were unable to find reasonable people willing to support the Administration.

—"Media Knock Iraq Attack Plans," Center for Media and Public Affairs (www.cmpa.com/pressrel/Iraq2002.PR.htm)

Torture and Forgiveness

Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe, has embarked on a violent campaign to evict white farmers from their land. As the political situation has deteriorated, torture of Mugabe's perceived political enemies—often in police stations or military facilities—has become commonplace, rising from twenty episodes a day before elections last March to fifty episodes a day by the end of that month. "I think it's no joke to say that in Zimbabwe ... probably 20 percent of the entire population has had intimate experience with torture," says the clinical director of an organization that studies human-rights violations. One sobering lesson from Zimbabwe involves the

destructive power of clemency:

☞ *The prevalence of torture in Zimbabwe is directly linked to a culture of impunity. That is, after every spasm of war or social upheaval since the 1970s war for independence, a law has been passed forgiving all those who committed human rights violations and other excesses ... "It's the way in which we Zimbabweans have elected to solve our political disputes. We don't have dialogue, we have violence. And when we have violence, we basically use torture. And when we're done with torture and with violence, then we forgive everybody."*

—"Zimbabwe and the Politics of Torture," United States Institute of Peace (www.usip.org/pubs/special_reports/sr92.pdf)

SOCIETY

Barbie? Unemployed?

Each fall for the past five years Beloit College, in Beloit, Wisconsin, has compiled its "Mindset List," which is designed to explain to aging faculty the cultural perspectives that inform the views of entering freshmen. For this year's freshmen, most of whom were born in 1984,

☞ *Cars have always had ... CD players and air bags.*

"Big Brother" is merely a television show.

Barbie has always had a job.

A "Hair Band" is some sort of fashion accessory.

George Foreman has always been a barbecue grill salesman.

There has always been an heir to the heir to the British throne.

Connie Chung [and] Geraldo Rivera [have never been] serious journalists.

Fox has always been a television network choice.

A "hotline" is a consumer service rather than a phone used to avoid accidental nuclear war.

—"Mindset List," Beloit College (www.beloit.edu/~pubaff/releases/mindset_2006.html)



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Get Thin Quick

A new study finds that sales pitches for weight-loss products are becoming ever more deceptive. In 2001, according to the Federal Trade Commission, nearly 40 percent of such ads in the study sample made at least one claim that "almost certainly is false" and 55 percent made at least one claim "that is very likely to be false or, at the very least, lacks adequate substantiation." Fully 42 percent of weight-loss ads surveyed employed before-and-after pictures, many of which showed weight-loss ranges that "in all likelihood" were "not achievable for the products being promoted." An example of a claim that the FTC deems "questionable":

☞ "You'll actually burn 12-16 times more fat each day than running 110 miles/week, 200 situps and pushups a day or 12 hours of nonstop Marine Corps calisthenics."

—"Weight-Loss Advertising: An Analysis of Current Trends," Federal Trade Commission (www.ftc.gov/bcp/reports/weightloss.pdf)

Same Old Double Standard

An analysis based on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health reveals that whereas the quality of a mother's relationship with her teenage daughter can measurably influence the daughter's age at first sexual intercourse, the quality of a mother's relationship with her teenage son will not affect his behavior at all. Similarly, whereas daughters whose mothers completed college tend to have a later age of first intercourse than other girls, mothers' education has no bearing on sons' sexual activity. (The strongest predictive factor for boys to emerge from this study is race: black males tend to have intercourse earlier than white or Hispanic males do.) Also, mothers interviewed were consistently opposed to either sons' or daughters' having sex, but they were more likely to rec-

ommend specific birth-control methods to sons than to daughters.

—"Mothers' Influence on the Timing of First Sex Among 14- and 15-Year-Olds," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 31, No. 3, September 2002

THE NATION

What Money Can't Buy

Reformers always worry about the amount of money in politics; economists sometimes wonder why there isn't more. A recent analysis by three MIT social scientists argues that corporate campaign contributions are simply not a good investment. Once a politician is in office, party affiliation and the abiding preferences of the politician's voting district are much stronger predictors of how the politician will vote than are the particular concerns of the special interests that gave the politician money. Contributing money to swing an election doesn't do a lot of good either. In a race for the House of Representatives, an additional \$100,000 typically achieves at most a one percent change in the vote.

—"Why Is There So Little Money in U.S. Politics?," by Stephen Ansolabehere, John de Figueiredo, and James M. Snyder Jr. (econ-www.mit.edu/faculty/snyder/files/CF_JEP_Final.pdf)

Run Like Hell

Speculation persists about Iraq's nuclear capability, but Americans should perhaps worry more about a nuclear threat closer to home. According to a report by the Project on Government Oversight, an independent watchdog organization, most of the sixty-five U.S. commercial nuclear-power plants (containing 103 reactors) have inadequate security. Although some plants hired additional guards after 9/11, others have simply boosted overtime, leading to overwork—for some guards, six straight days of twelve-hour shifts. Training is inade-

quate. One worker told the authors, "If an attack took place, most of the guards would run like hell."

☞ *Nuclear industry executives have repeatedly claimed that guards are given 270 hours of training before being posted; that they receive 90 hours per year to requalify with their weapons; and that they receive 30 hours per year in antiterrorist tactical exercises ... None of these claims appear to be true. When asked to explain industry's claims that guards receive 270 hours of training before beginning their job, one guard joked, "Maybe if you add the training hours of all the guards together."*

—"Nuclear Power Plant Security: Voices From Inside the Fences," Project on Government Oversight (www.pogo.org/p/environment/eo-020901-nukepower.html)

The First Twelve Days

Everyone knows that the United States is among the world's worst polluters, but a new report from the National Environmental Trust offers a striking comparison: Vermont, the least significant polluter among the fifty states, by itself emits more greenhouse gases than thirty-three developing countries combined. Another recent NET report assesses California's air quality in the five most populous regions:

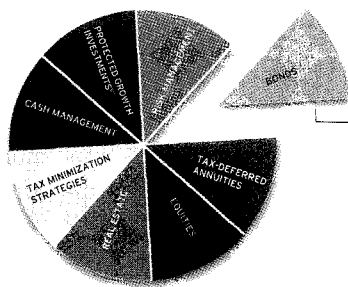
☞ *Both newborns and adults in these five California air basins exceed EPA's recommended one-in-one million lifetime [cancer] risk with less than a year of exposure to California air—newborns by as much as a factor of 30, adults by as much as a factor of 15 ... A child born in the South Coast air basin has to live there only 12 days before he or she accumulates a lifetime's acceptable cancer risk. Children in the other four California air basins exceed the one-in-one million risk in 19 to 23 days.*

—"First in Emissions, Behind in Solutions," "Toxic Beginnings: Cancer Risks to Children from California's Air Pollution," National Environmental Trust (environet.policy.net)



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BULLISH on AMERICA

THE GUN TRADE

The price of an AK-47 as a barometer of social stability

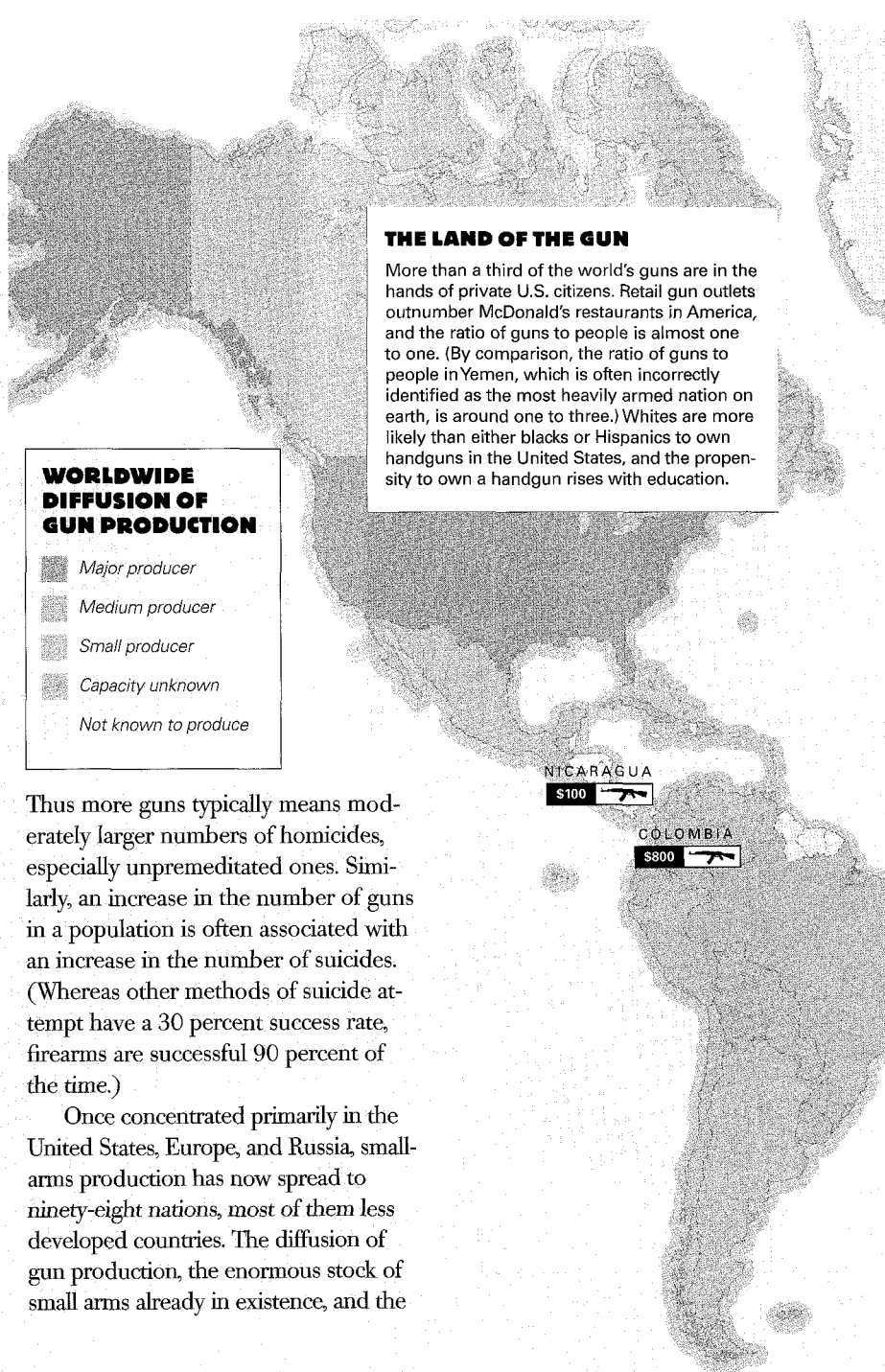
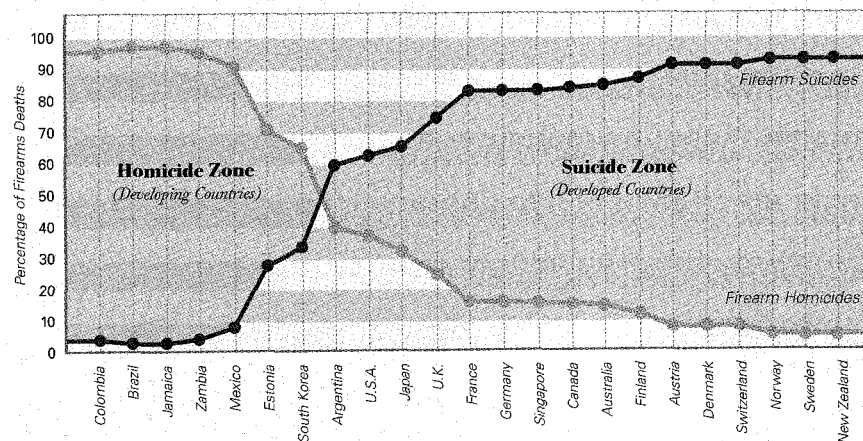
The number of guns worldwide is difficult to gauge precisely: guns move quickly from place to place, and are often held by people who have reason to hide them. The best current estimate—from the 2002 Small Arms Survey, undertaken by the Graduate Institute of International Studies, in Geneva—indicates that about 640 million small arms, ranging from handguns to rocket launchers, exist worldwide. That amounts to one gun for every ten people on earth.

Although gun production has slowed substantially over the past decade, principally because of military downsizing, legal small-arms manufacturers produced about 8 million new guns in 2000—overwhelmingly for private purchase. It is likely that the stockpile of guns held by private citizens worldwide is growing at a substantially faster rate than population.

In stable societies the relationship between the prevalence of guns and the incidence of violence is not always clear. Few studies show overall crime rates rising with gun prevalence—indeed, widespread gun ownership may deter some kinds of crime, such as robberies and assaults. But because of their efficiency in wounding and killing, guns do appear to increase the severity of crime.

LIVING IN THE SUICIDE ZONE

Homicides make up the majority of gun-related deaths in developing countries, but in many developed countries gun suicides outnumber gun homicides by more than four to one.



THE LAND OF THE GUN

More than a third of the world's guns are in the hands of private U.S. citizens. Retail gun outlets outnumber McDonald's restaurants in America, and the ratio of guns to people is almost one to one. (By comparison, the ratio of guns to people in Yemen, which is often incorrectly identified as the most heavily armed nation on earth, is around one to three.) Whites are more likely than either blacks or Hispanics to own handguns in the United States, and the propensity to own a handgun rises with education.

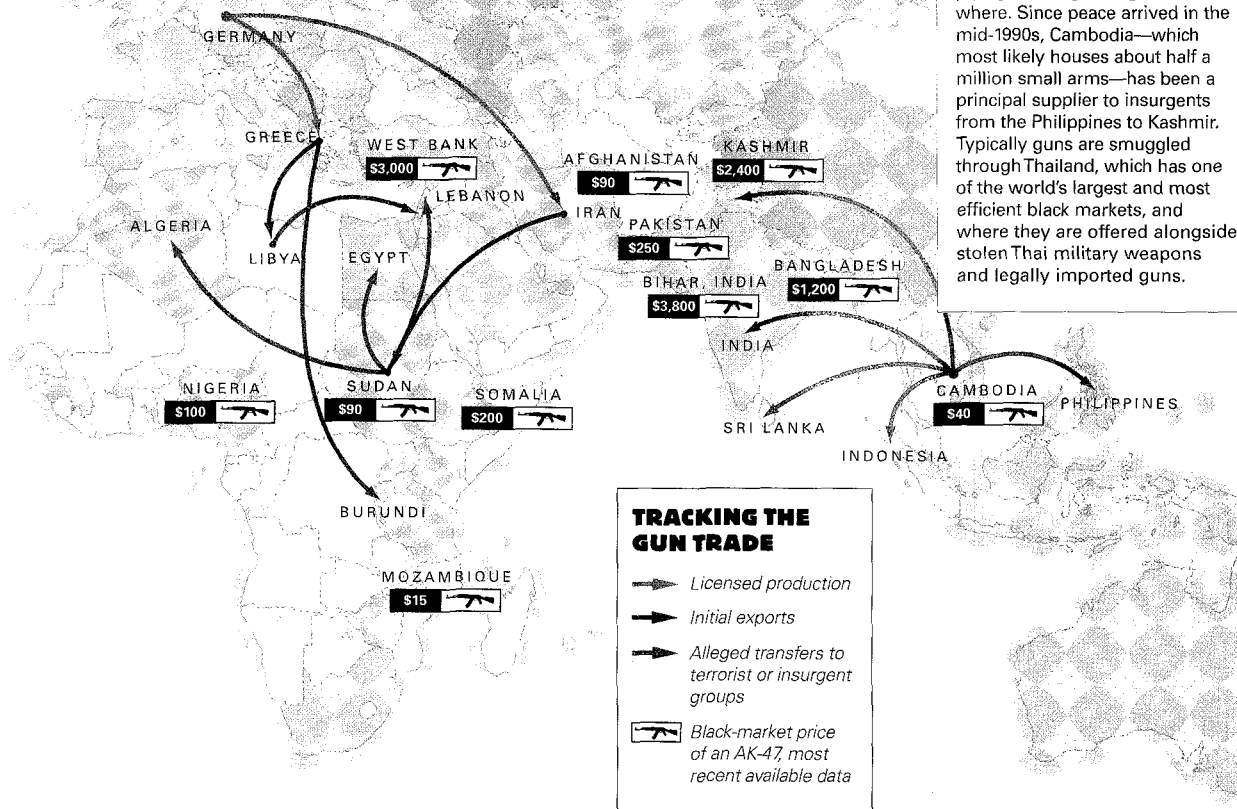
expansion of global trade have made the illicit flow of guns to areas of insurgency and conflict increasingly difficult to stop, as the arrows on the map attest.

Although the diffusion of small arms has drawn less attention than the spread of heavy armaments and weapons of mass destruction, it is nonetheless significant. More than 80 percent of the violent conflicts of the past decade made use of small arms alone.

Black-market gun prices can be one of the best indicators of looming—or ebbing—conflict. The map displays recent black-market prices of AK-47

ARMING A TERRORIST IN THREE SIMPLE STEPS

Since the 1960s arms makers in fourteen developed countries have established "licensed production" agreements with companies in forty-six other countries. Offshore factories often face fewer restrictions on export destinations, and their multiplication has made any restraint on the small-arms trade extremely difficult. The green arrows below show the locations of just two of the foreign companies licensed for production by Heckler & Koch, a British-owned, German-based maker of assault rifles; the blue arrows show subsequent exports from those companies. The red arrows indicate pathways used by countries that are alleged to illicitly transfer weapons to terrorists and insurgents. In recent years fifty-one countries are said to have violated UN arms embargoes (often through lax export controls), including China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, and Israel.

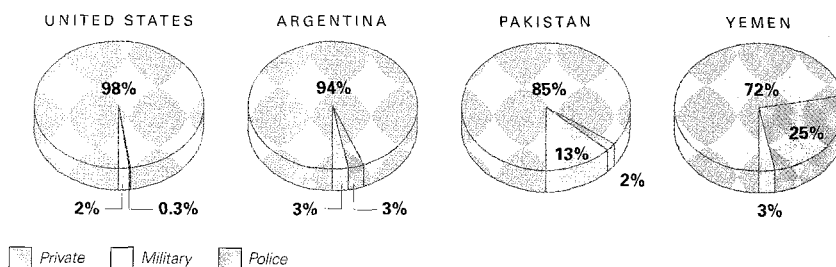


assault rifles, whose killing power and widespread availability make them the weapon of choice for most insurgents. Under stable conditions and in legal markets a used AK-47 typically fetches \$230 to \$400. Prices under \$100 usually indicate a sudden arrival of peace after a period of intense conflict. Rock-bottom prices—\$40 or less—create their own problems, typically the widespread arming of petty criminals and a very high rate of shooting deaths for months or years after political stability has returned.

Prices above \$1,000, on the other hand, can be a powerful warning of imminent or expanding conflict. High prices mean that people are desperate to own weapons, and that normal supply chains cannot keep up with demand. Once new supply routes are found,

WHO HAS GUNS?

Arms distribution among the military, the police, and private citizens in selected countries, 2001



weapons will flood the market, and violence may erupt.

One must take care in interpreting gun prices, because they can change very quickly. In Somalia, for example, in 1992, the cost of an AK-47 fell from \$300 to \$100 in a matter of days, as U.S. Marines massed offshore, and to \$50 shortly after they landed, only to rise back to about \$200 (where it has

since remained) after U.S. withdrawal. And many of the prices listed are more than a year old. Still, prices in excess of \$2,000 in Kashmir and northeastern India suggest that the region should be watched closely, even if nuclear conflict no longer seems imminent. In the West Bank the price of an assault rifle—never low in recent years—has more than doubled since 1999. —DON PECK

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THE MEDICAL ORDEALS OF JFK

Recent assessments of Kennedy's presidency have tended to raise "questions of character"—to view his Administration in the context of his sometimes wayward personal behavior. Such assessments are incomplete. Newly uncovered medical records reveal that the scope and intensity of his physical suffering were beyond what we had previously imagined. What Kennedy endured—and what he hid from the public—both complicates and enlarges our understanding of his character

BY ROBERT DALLEK

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Concealing one's true medical condition from the voting public is a time-honored tradition of the American presidency. William Henry Harrison, who died of pneumonia in April of 1841, after only one month in office, was the first Chief Executive to hide his physical frailties. Nine years later Zachary Taylor's handlers refused to acknowledge that cholera had put the President's life in jeopardy; they denied rumors of illness until he was near death, in July of 1850, sixteen months into his presidency. During Grover Cleveland's second term, in the 1890s, the White House deceived the public by dismissing allegations that surgeons had removed a cancerous growth from the President's mouth; a vulcanized-rubber prosthesis disguised the absence of much of Cleveland's upper left jaw and part of his palate. The public knew nothing about the implant until one of the President's physicians revealed it in 1917, nine years after Cleveland's death.

In the twentieth century Woodrow Wilson, Calvin Coolidge, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower all, to one degree or another, held back the full truth about medical difficulties that could have jeopardized their hold on the Oval Office. Wilson suffered a paralyzing stroke in 1919 that made him merely a figurehead during the last year and a half of his term. After Coolidge's sixteen-year-old son died of blood poisoning, in the summer of 1924, Coolidge himself struggled with a clinical depression that made inactivity and passivity the principal features of his Administration. It has been well known for some time that Roosevelt went to great lengths to conceal how physically incapacitated he had been rendered by polio. If voters had known the truth about his generally deteriorating health in 1944, it is unlikely that they would have re-elected him a

third time—but they did not know, and FDR died just three months into his fourth term, in April of 1945. Though Eisenhower was much more open about his health than any of his predecessors, the full disclosure of his maladies (including heart disease) in 1956, when he was sixty-six, might have discouraged the country from electing him President again; he had a heart attack during his first term and suffered a number of other medical problems, including a minor stroke, during his second.

The lifelong health problems of John F. Kennedy constitute one of the best-kept secrets of recent U.S. history—no surprise, because if the extent of those problems had been revealed while he was alive, his presidential ambitions would likely have been dashed. Kennedy, like so many of his predecessors, was more intent on winning the presidency than on revealing himself to the public. On one level this secrecy can be taken as another stain on his oft-criticized character, a deception maintained at the potential expense of the citizens he was elected to lead. Yet there is another way of viewing the silence regarding his health—as the quiet stoicism of a man struggling to endure extraordinary pain and distress and performing his presidential (and pre-presidential) duties largely undeterred by his physical suffering. Does this not also speak to his character, but in a more complex way?

Not only the extent of Kennedy's medical problems but the lengths to which he and his family went to conceal them were significant. According to Bill Walton, a Kennedy family friend, JFK was followed everywhere during the 1960 presidential campaign by an aide with a special bag containing the "medical support" that was needed all the time. When the bag was misplaced during a trip to Connecticut, Kennedy

telephoned Governor Abe Ribicoff and said, "There's a medical bag floating around and it can't get in anybody's hands ... You have to find that bag." If the wrong people got hold of it, he said, "it would be murder." (The bag was recovered.)

In 1983 the Kennedy biographer Herbert Parmet observed that "dealing with the Kennedy medical history is in some ways like trying to uncover aspects of vital national-security operations." In 1995, when executors of Joseph P. Kennedy's estate made additional family papers available in the JFK Library, reports to Joe about Jack's medical condition remained closed. Before, during, and since his presidency, the Kennedys have guarded JFK's medical records from public view, apparently worrying that even posthumous revelations about his health would hurt his reputation for honest dealings with the public.

Of course, evidence of Kennedy's medical problems has been trickling out for years. In 1960, during the fight for the Democratic nomination, John Connally and India Edwards, aides to Lyndon B. Johnson, told the press—correctly—that Kennedy suffered from Addison's disease, a condition of the adrenal glands characterized by a deficiency of the hormones needed to regulate blood sugar, sodium and potassium, and the response to stress. They described the problem as life-threatening and requiring regular doses of cortisone. The Kennedys publicly denied the allegation. They released a letter from two of JFK's doctors describing his health as "excellent" and Kennedy as fully capable of serving as President. During his Administration, according to Admiral George Burkley, a physician on the White House staff, Kennedy was so determined not to give the impression that he was "physically impaired ... and require[d] the constant supervision of a physician" that he shunned having "a medical man in the near proximity to him" in public.

It appears that Richard Nixon may have tried at one point to gain access to Kennedy's medical history. In the fall of 1960, as he and JFK battled in what turned out to be one of the closest presidential elections ever, thieves ransacked the office of Eugene J. Cohen, a New York endocrinologist who had been treating Kennedy for Addison's disease. When they failed to find Kennedy's records, which were filed under a code name, they tried unsuccessfully to break into the office of Janet Travell, an internist and pharmacologist who had been relieving Kennedy's back pain with injections of procaine (an agent similar to lidocaine). Although the thieves remain unidentified, it is reasonable to speculate that they were Nixon operatives; the failed robberies have the aura of Watergate and of the break-in at the Beverly Hills office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Using personal letters, Navy records, and oral histories, biographers and historians over the past twenty years have begun to fill in a picture of Jack Kennedy as ill and ailment-ridden for his entire life—a far cry from the paragon of vigor (or "vigah," in the family's distinctive Massachusetts accent) that the Kennedys presented. After a sickly child-

hood he spent significant periods during his prep school and college years in the hospital for severe intestinal ailments, infections, and what doctors thought for a time was leukemia. He suffered from ulcers and colitis as well as Addison's disease, which necessitated the administration of regular steroid treatments. And it has been known for some time that Kennedy endured terrible back trouble. He wrote his book *Profiles in Courage* while recovering from back surgery in 1954 that almost killed him.

But the full extent of Kennedy's medical ordeals has not been known until now. Earlier this year a small committee of Kennedy Administration friends and associates agreed to open a collection of his papers for the years 1955–1963. I was



An ailing Kennedy campaigns for the Senate in 1952

given access to these newly released materials, which included x-rays and prescription records from Janet Travell's files. Together with recent research and a growing understanding of medical science, the newly available records allow us to construct an authoritative account of JFK's medical tribulations. And they add telling detail to a story of lifelong suffering, revealing that many of the various treatments doctors gave Kennedy, starting when he was a boy, did far more harm than good. In particular, steroid treatments that he may have received as a young man for his intestinal ailments could have compounded—and perhaps even caused—both the Addison's disease and the degenerative back trouble that

plagued him later in life. Travell's prescription records also confirm that during his presidency—and in particular during times of stress, such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco, in April of 1961, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, in October of 1962—Kennedy was taking an extraordinary variety of medications: steroids for his Addison's disease; painkillers for his back; anti-spasmodics for his colitis; antibiotics for urinary-tract infections; antihistamines for allergies; and, on at least one occasion, an anti-psychotic (though only for two days) for a severe mood change that Jackie Kennedy believed had been brought on by the antihistamines.

Kennedy's charismatic appeal rested heavily on the image of youthful energy and good health he projected. This image was a myth. The real story, disconcerting though it would have been to contemplate at the time, is actually more heroic. It is a story of iron-willed fortitude in mastering the difficulties of chronic illness.

"GOD WHAT A BEATING I'M TAKING"

Kennedy suffered severe health problems almost from the time of his birth. Three months before he turned three, in 1920, he came down with a bad case of scarlet fever, a highly contagious illness, and life-threatening for so small a child. He spent more than two

for a fifteen-year-old boy. In January and February of 1933 "flu-like symptoms" plagued him, along with almost constant pain in his knees. "Jack's winter term sounded like a hospital report," an official fiftieth-anniversary remembrance of his attendance at Choate recounted, "with correspondence flying back and forth between Rose Kennedy and [the headmaster's wife]. Again, eyes, ears, teeth, knees, arches, from the top of his head to the tip of his toes, Jack needed attention."

Over the summer of 1933, after he had turned sixteen, he gained no weight. And matters got worse the following year. In the winter of 1934 he became very sick and had to be rushed by ambulance to New Haven Hospital for observation. His symptoms included weight loss and a bad case of hives. Doctors feared that he had leukemia and began regularly checking his blood counts. "It seems that I was much sicker than I thought I was," Jack wrote to his classmate LeMoyne Billings after he got out of the hospital, "and am supposed to be dead, so I am developing a limp and a hollow cough." His rectum was "plenty red after the hospital," he complained. "Yours would be red too if you had shoved every thing from rubber tubes to iron pipes up it." By March, Jack's symptoms had largely disappeared, but his doctors remained uncertain about the cause of his difficulties.

NEWLY AVAILABLE MEDICAL RECORDS REVEAL THAT STEROID TREATMENTS KENNEDY MAY HAVE RECEIVED AS A YOUNG MAN COULD HAVE COMPOUNDED BOTH THE ADDISON'S DISEASE AND THE DEGENERATIVE BACK TROUBLE THAT PLAGUED HIM LATER IN LIFE.

months in the hospital and recuperating in a Maine sanatorium.

During the 1920s he suffered from a variety of other childhood maladies, including bronchitis, chicken pox, ear infections, German measles, measles, mumps, and whooping cough. His illnesses filled the family with anxiety about his survival.

In 1930, at age thirteen, Jack was afflicted with an undiagnosed illness that restricted his activities. From October to December he lost four to six pounds, felt "pretty tired," and did not grow. One doctor attributed it to a lack of milk in his diet, but that failed to explain why during a chapel service at the Canterbury School, his boarding school in New Milford, Connecticut, he felt "sick dizzy and weak." He wrote to his father, "I just about fainted, and everything began to get black so I went out and then I fell and Mr. Hume [the headmaster] caught me. I am O.K. now." In April of 1931 Jack collapsed with abdominal pains, and the surgeon who examined him concluded that it was appendicitis and that an operation was necessary at a nearby hospital in Danbury, Connecticut.

The operation did not solve the problem. In the fall of 1932, while boarding at the Choate School, in Wallingford, Connecticut, Jack complained of abdominal discomfort and fatigue. His weight was only 117 pounds—less than robust

In June of 1934, as his junior year at Choate ended, he began feeling ill again, and his parents sent him to the famous Mayo Clinic, in Rochester, Minnesota. He spent a miserable month there, "the God-damnest hole I've ever seen," he wrote to Billings. By himself at the Mayo and then at nearby St. Mary's Hospital, where he was transferred after two weeks, he maintained his sanity and kept up his hopes for a return to friends and family through a series of such letters. Jack handled what he feared was a life-threatening disease with a biting wit and a refusal to complain openly to anyone but his friend. Judging from the medical tests described in the correspondence and in later medical records, Jack had colitis, which was initially thought to be peptic-ulcer disease. The doctors began by prescribing a diet of bland food preparatory to tests that Jack had hoped would be over in a few days. But the exams lasted much longer. "I am suffering terribly out here," he wrote to Billings. "I now have a gut ache all the time. I'm still eating peas and corn for my food." He expected to be there for at least another twelve days. Two days later he told Billings, "God what a beating I'm taking. I've lost 8 lbs. And still going down ... I'm showing them a thing or two. Nobody able to figure what's wrong with me. All they do is talk about what an interesting case."

"It would be funny," he declared wishfully, "if there was nothing wrong with me. I'm commencing to stay awake nights on that. Still don't know when I'll get home. My last eight meals have been peas, corn, prunes."

Six days later he gave Billings another graphic description of his ordeal. "I've got something wrong with my intestines. In other words I shit blood." He feared he might be dying. The doctors were still trying to determine the cause of his illness. "Yesterday I went through the most harassing experience of my life," Jack wrote. "[A doctor] stuck an iron tube 12 inches long and 1 inch in diameter up my ass ... My poor bedraggled rectum is looking at me very reproachfully these days ... The reason I'm here is that they may have to cut out my stomach!!!!—the latest news."

All the gastrointestinal and colon tests indicated that Jack had colitis and digestive problems, which made it difficult for him to gain weight and threatened deadly consequences if the colon became ulcerated or bled.

Judging from accounts published in the January 1934 and December 1936 issues of the Mayo Clinic journal, *Proceedings*, the clinic's usual therapy for colitis involved a combination of restricted diet; relief of emotional stress, which was assumed to be a major contributor to both colitis and ulcers; and injection of a serum obtained from horses. Although the clinic claimed a measure of success with this treatment, it was clearly no panacea. Corticosteroids, which research centers were then testing, seemed more promising in the treatment of a whole variety of illnesses.

WHAT STEROIDS DID TO HIM

In the late 1930s the first clinical use of corticosteroids—which are compounds derived from adrenal extracts, and which have come to be used to reduce tissue inflammation—was made possible when doctors learned how to administer DOCA (desoxycorticosterone acetate) in the form of pellets implanted under the skin. It is now well established that Kennedy was treated with DOCA after his Addison's disease was diagnosed, in 1947. But it is possible that Jack was taking DOCA as early as 1937. Early that year, in a handwritten note to his father after a family vacation, Jack worried about getting a prescription filled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he was a freshman at Harvard College. "Ordering stuff here very [illegible word]," he wrote to his father. "I would be sure you get the prescription. Some of that stuff as it is very potent and he [Jack's doctor] seems to be keeping it pretty quiet." Given that corticosteroids had just become clinically viable and were being touted as a therapeutic cure-all, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the prescription Jack asked for was DOCA. Moreover, nine years later, in 1946, Paul Fay, one of Jack's friends, watched him implant a pellet in his leg. The way in which the medication was administered indicates it was DOCA. Fay remembers Jack's using "a little knife ... [to] just barely cut the surface of the skin, try not to get blood,

and then get underneath and put this tablet underneath the skin, and then put a bandage over it." Then, he said, "hopefully this tablet would dissolve by the heat of the body and be absorbed by the bloodstream." In short, it appears that Jack was on steroids—still an experimental treatment, with great uncertainty as to dosage—for his colitis well before the Addison's disease diagnosis.

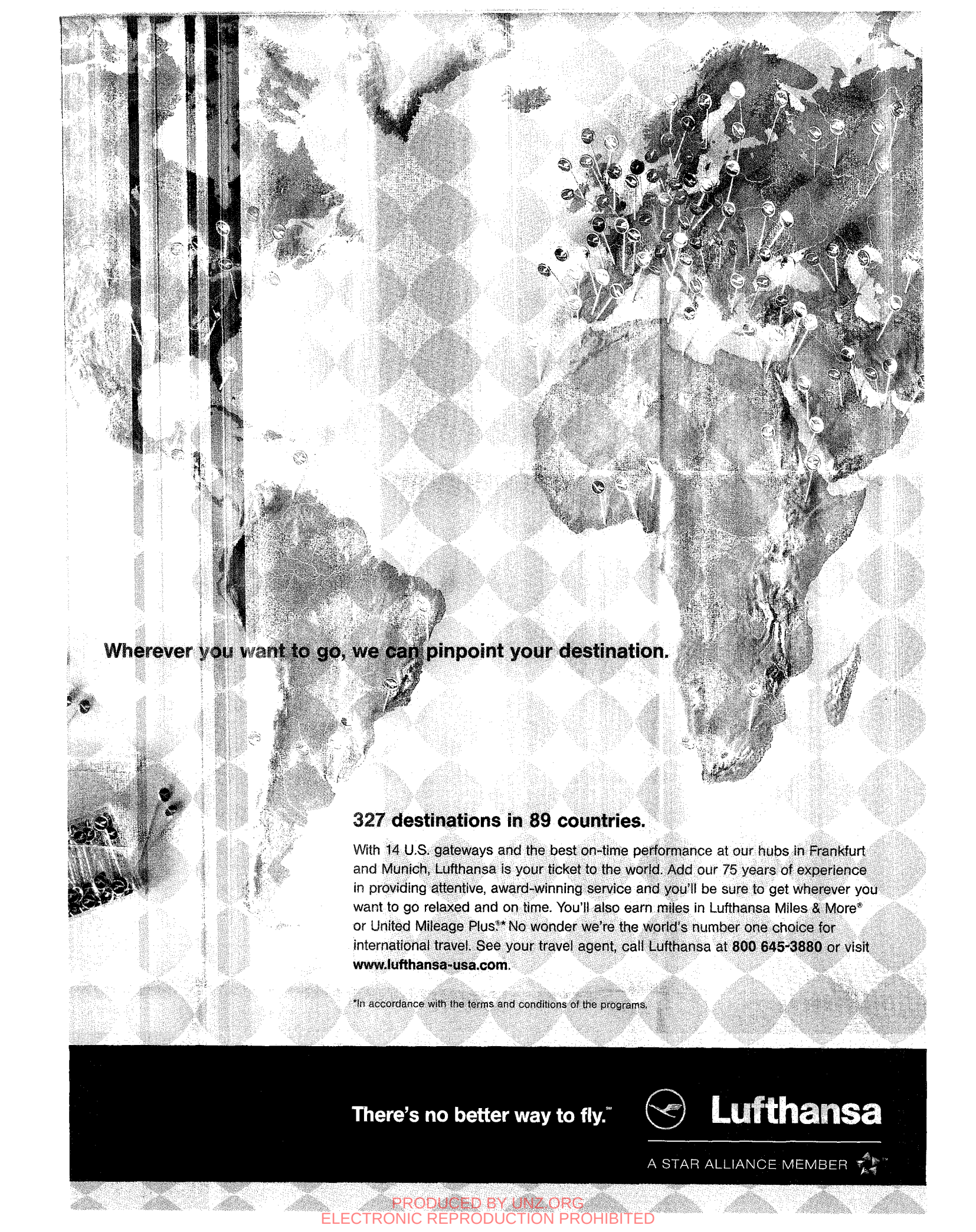
If so, he may have paid a high price. Physicians in the 1930s and 1940s did not realize what is common medical knowledge today—namely, that corticosteroids are effective in treating acute colitis but have deleterious long-term effects, including osteoporosis of lower-back bones and increased incidence of serious infection (owing to suppression of the body's immune system). Kennedy would suffer from all these problems, including outright degeneration of his lumbar spine. In addition, the long-term use of corticosteroids suppresses normal adrenal function; it may have been the cause of Kennedy's Addison's disease. (Jack's sister Eunice also had Addison's, however, indicating that his disease may have had an inherited component.)

From September of 1934 to June of 1935, Jack's senior year of prep school, the school infirmary had kept a close watch on his blood count; Joe Kennedy passed these records on to the Mayo doctors. At that time there was still concern that Jack might be suffering from leukemia. In retrospect, any changes in his blood count may have been a reaction to the drugs he was taking. When he fell ill the following autumn, a doctor advised that Jack had agranulocytosis, a decrease in granular white blood cells, which made him more susceptible to infections.

Shortly after leaving Choate, Jack had to spend two months at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, in Boston. Uncertain whether they were dealing strictly with colitis or with a combination of colitis and ulcers, and worried that his medicines were playing havoc with his white-blood-cell count, his doctors performed additional tests. According to a letter Jack wrote to Billings, his white-blood-cell count was 6,000 when he entered the hospital and down to 3,500 three weeks later. "At 1500 you die," Jack joked. "They call me '2000 to go Kennedy.'"

By the end of January 1936 he was more worried than ever about his health, though he continued to use humor to defend himself against thoughts of dying. "Took a peak [sic] at my chart yesterday and could see that they were mentally measuring me for a coffin. Eat drink & make Olive [his current girlfriend], as tomorrow or next week we attend my funeral. I think the Rockefeller Institute may take my case ... Flash—they are going to stick that tube up my ass again as they did at Mayo."

From 1938 to the end of 1940, while Kennedy attended Harvard, intestinal problems plagued him relentlessly. In February of 1938 he had gone back to the Mayo Clinic for more studies, but with no good results. In June he spent two weeks in New England Baptist Hospital for the same



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complaints, but again with no improvement. In October he was still “in rotten shape,” but he refused to re-enter the hospital for more of what now seemed like pointless tests. In February of 1939, however, he gave in and went back to the Mayo Clinic. It was the same old routine: a diet of bland foods three times a day and another inspection of his colon and digestive system. By November, under the care of William Murphy, of Harvard, the physician and Nobel laureate who co-discovered the treatment for pernicious anemia and had an uncommon faith in the healing power of liver extracts, Jack recorded that he was going to “take my first liver injection today and I hope they work.” They did not. A year later he was still wrestling with abdominal pain, spastic colon, and low weight. If he was taking DOCA and it was limiting the effects of his colitis (and it is not clear that it was), it was certainly worsening his stomach problems. The steroids may also have contributed to the onset of duodenal ulcers, which weren’t diagnosed until November of 1943. But there would be no public acknowledgment of any of these ailments, or any outwardly evident self-pity. Refusing to let health concerns stop him became a pattern that allowed Kennedy to pursue a political career.

“YELLOW AS SAFFRON”

Serious back problems added to Kennedy’s miseries from 1940 on. In 1938 he had begun having “an occasional pain in his right sacro-iliac joint,” according to a Navy medical history recorded in December of 1944.

It apparently grew worse but at times he was completely free from symptoms. In the latter part of 1940 while playing tennis he experienced a sudden pain in his lower right back—it seemed to him that “something had slipped.” He was hospitalized at the Lahey Clinic ... for ten days. A low back support was applied and he was comfortable. Since that time he has had periodic attacks of a similar nature.

Kennedy’s service in the southwest Pacific on PT boats—which he managed to arrange by calling on his father’s connections to hide his various illnesses from military physicians—added to his pain, especially after a Japanese destroyer sank his boat, leading to a week-long physical ordeal. (For all the accuracy of the popular accounts praising Kennedy’s valor on *PT-109*, the larger story of his endurance has not been told. Lennie Thom, his executive officer, wrote letters home discussing JFK’s back problem and his refusal to report to sick bay: “Jack feigned being well.” Kennedy acknowledged to his parents that life on the boats was “not exactly what the Dr ... ordered.” But he did not let on to his crew or his commanding officer that he was ill or in pain. And except for his chronic back ailment, which he simply could not hide, and which he seemed to take care of by wearing a “corset-type thing” and sleeping with a plywood board under his mattress, the men on *PT-109* saw no poor health. Before the war was over, however,

Kennedy found himself once again in the hospital for both back and stomach problems.)

Although college football injuries and his Navy mishaps may have contributed to the back pain, the steroids he was most likely taking to control his colitis may have caused the underlying problem. Navy medical records indicate that back surgery Kennedy underwent in 1944 had revealed clear evidence of osteoporosis. The surgeons removed “some abnormally soft disc interspace material” and anticipated additional problems if he continued to suffer bone loss. It was, as it had long been with Kennedy, one thing after another.

At the beginning of 1945 Kennedy went to Castle Hot Springs, Arizona, in an attempt to recover his health. It was an elusive quest. Although he refused to complain to his father about his continuing maladies, his doctor reported to Joe that Jack was “not getting along well at all.” He remained in almost constant back pain, and he had trouble digesting his food. A companion in Arizona remembered that “he looked jaundiced—yellow as saffron and as thin as a rake.” He returned to the Mayo Clinic for a while, but the doctors had nothing new to recommend, so he didn’t stay; he traveled to San Francisco and Europe as a correspondent for the Hearst newspapers. Friends in San Francisco told him he looked “sickly”; in Europe he became terribly ill with a high fever, nausea, and vomiting. Back in Boston, in June of 1946, he collapsed at a parade, where a witness remembered his turning “very yellow and blue” and looking like he was having a heart attack.

Despite his medical difficulties, Kennedy ran successfully for a House seat in 1946. A returning war veteran who knew him then says, “I was as thin as I could be at that time, but Jack was even thinner. He was actually like a skeleton, thin and drawn.” Despite the medications he was taking for the colitis, he continued to have abdominal pain and problems gaining weight. Because hot baths gave him temporary relief, he spent some time every day soaking in a tub. He also had experienced a burning sensation when urinating, the result of a “non-specific urethritis” dating from 1940 (possibly an infection contracted from a sexual encounter in college), which later became chronic prostatitis, or inflammation of the prostate, which sulfa drugs temporarily suppressed.

A strenuous daily routine during the campaign intensified Kennedy’s fatigue, nausea, and vomiting—symptoms of the as yet undiagnosed Addison’s disease. People around him noticed his bulging eyes and jaundiced complexion, and the limp caused by unrelenting pain. They marveled at his stamina and refusal to complain; it was “a tremendous effort of will,” one of them says.

The following year, while in England, Kennedy became ill again. He ended up in a hospital in London, where a doctor for the first time diagnosed the Addison’s disease. (Because Kennedy had served in the South Pacific and

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malaria has similar symptoms, and because Kennedy's long history of stomach and colon problems suggested that his difficulties were related to an ulcer or colitis, his previous doctors had not diagnosed the Addison's.) The doctor told Pamela Churchill, Winston Churchill's daughter-in-law and a friend of Kennedy's, "That young American friend of yours, he hasn't got a year to live." On his way home to the United States, on the *Queen Mary*, Kennedy became so sick that upon arrival a priest was brought aboard to give him last rites before he was carried off the ship on a stretcher. In 1948, when bad weather made a plane trip "iffy," he told his friend Ted Reardon, "It's okay for someone with my life expectancy," but suggested that his sister Kathleen and Reardon take the train.

By 1950 Kennedy was suffering almost constant lower-back aches and spasms. X-rays in the Travell records, which I examined with the help of a physician, show that the fourth lumbar vertebra had narrowed from 1.5 cm to 1.1 cm, indicating collapse in the bones supporting his spinal column. By March of 1951 there were clear compression fractures in his lower spine. He needed crutches to get up a flight of stairs. Later that year, during a trip to Japan, he had a severe crisis related to Addison's when he apparently neglected to take his steroid medications. He ran a temper-

cold shaking hands with workers arriving at a meatpacking plant in Wisconsin. Powers whispered to Kenneth O'Donnell, another Kennedy aide, "God, if I had his money, I'd be down there on the patio at Palm Beach.")

By the spring of 1954 Kennedy's back pain had become almost unbearable. X-rays show that the fifth lumbar vertebra had collapsed. Kennedy could not bend to pull a sock onto his left foot, and he had to ascend and descend stairs moving sideways. Beginning in May he had to rely on crutches more than ever, and walks from his office to the Senate for quorum and roll calls, on hard marble floors, became a daily ordeal. In August a team of physicians from the Lahey Clinic, in Boston, visited him on Cape Cod, where they described yet another surgery, a complicated procedure to achieve spinal and sacroiliac fusions that, they hoped, would strengthen his lower spine. They explained that without the operation he might lose his ability to walk, but that so difficult a surgery on someone with Addison's disease posed risks of a fatal infection, because the steroids were suppressing his immune system.

Rose Kennedy said later, "Jack was determined to have the operation. He told his father that even if the risks were fifty-fifty, he would rather be dead than spend the rest of his life hobbling on crutches and paralyzed by pain." Joe

FROM MAY OF 1955 TO OCTOBER OF 1957 KENNEDY WAS HOSPITALIZED NINE TIMES, FOR A TOTAL OF FORTY-FIVE DAYS. THE RECORD OF THESE TWO AND A HALF YEARS READS LIKE THE ORDEAL OF AN OLD MAN, NOT ONE IN HIS LATE THIRTIES, IN THE PRIME OF LIFE.

ature of 106°, and his doctors feared for his life. The episode convinced him to be more rigorous about taking his medicine, and over the next two years back problems became his principal complaint.

In 1952, during a successful campaign to replace Henry Cabot Lodge as senator from Massachusetts, Kennedy suffered headaches, upper respiratory infections, stomachaches, urinary-tract discomfort, and nearly unceasing back pain. He consulted an ear, nose, and throat specialist about his headaches; took anti-spasmodics and applied heat fifteen minutes a day to ease his stomach troubles; consulted urologists about his bladder and prostate discomfort; had DOCA pellets implanted and took daily oral doses of cortisone to control his Addison's disease; and struggled unsuccessfully to find relief from his back miseries.

Dave Powers, one of Kennedy's principal aides, remembers that at the end of each day on the road during the campaign, Kennedy would climb into the back seat of the car, where "he would lean back ... and close his eyes in pain." At the hotel he would use crutches to get himself up stairs and then soak in a hot bath for an hour before going to bed. "The pain," Powers adds, "often made him tense and irritable with his fellow travelers." (Much later, in February of 1960, during the presidential campaign, as Kennedy stood for hours in the freezing

tried to dissuade his son from the surgery, reminding him of FDR's extraordinary achievements despite confinement to a wheelchair. After he entered the New York Hospital for Special Surgery, on October 10, the team of endocrinologists and surgeons postponed the operation three times in order to assure an "extended metabolic work-up prior to, during, and after surgery."

The operation, which finally took place on October 21 and lasted more than three hours, was at best a limited success. A metal plate was inserted to stabilize Kennedy's lower spine. Afterward a urinary-tract infection put his life in jeopardy. He went into a coma, and once again a priest was called to administer last rites. By December Kennedy had shaken the infection and was sufficiently recovered to be moved to the family's Palm Beach home. Nevertheless, he remained far from well; his doctors could not promise that he would ever walk again. Moreover, there was reason to believe that the site of the plate was infected. Consequently, in February another operation was performed at New York Hospital, to remove the plate. The Travell records show that extracting it meant removing three screws that had been drilled into bone and replacing damaged cartilage with a bone graft. After another three months recuperating in Florida, Kennedy returned to Washington in May.

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THE COVER-UP

Because his absence from Washington over so long a period could not be hidden, the Kennedys had no choice but to acknowledge JFK's condition. Public awareness of his surgery and slow recovery, however, benefited rather than undermined his image. Kennedy came through this medical ordeal looking courageous—not weak and possibly unfit for higher office, as his family had feared. Nevertheless, the Kennedys did not trust that coming clean about his health problems in the future would generate a similar result. Consequently, the true state of his health now became a carefully guarded secret. His closest aides did not know the full extent of his problems. Although Evelyn Lincoln, Kennedy's secretary, made sure that he took his daily medications (as many as eight different kinds), she apparently had limited knowledge of why he needed them. The evidence I've seen suggests that only Jackie, Joe, Bobby, and Jack's doctors were fully informed.

One thing in particular remained unknown until the Travell records were opened this year: from May of 1955 until October of 1957, as he tried to get the 1956 vice-presidential nomination and then began organizing his presidential campaign, Kennedy was hospitalized nine times, for a total of forty-five days, including one nineteen-day stretch and two week-long stays. The record of these two and a half years reads like the ordeal of an old man, not one in his late thirties, in the prime of life.

All Kennedy's confinements at this time were at New York Hospital, except for one in July of 1955, at New England Baptist. Terrible back pain triggered an eight-day hospitalization beginning on May 26, 1955. General work-ups from this period noted continuing back miseries, with a chronic abscess at the site of his 1954–1955 surgeries; repeated bouts of colitis with abdominal pain, diarrhea, and dehydration; and prostatitis marked by pain on urination and ejaculation, along with urinary-tract infections. On July 3 he spent one day at New England Baptist being treated for severe diarrhea. Eleven days later he entered New York Hospital for a week to relieve his back pain and treat another attack of diarrhea.

On January 11, 1956, he spent three days in the hospital, where he received large doses of antibiotics to counter respiratory and urinary-tract infections. When nausea, vomiting, dehydration, and continuing urinary discomfort occurred at the end of January 1957, he spent two more days in the hospital. In July abdominal cramps put him in the hospital again for forty-eight hours. Fevers of unknown origin, severe abdominal discomfort, weight loss, throat and urinary-tract infections, a recurrence of his back abscess (which was surgically drained), and his all too familiar acute back pain and spasms resulted in three hospitalizations for a total of twenty-two miserable days in September and October.

During this time Kennedy had zero flexion and extension of his back, meaning that he could not bend forward or

backward at all; only with great difficulty could he turn over in bed, sit in a low chair, or reach across a table to pull papers toward him. He also had problems bending his right knee and from a sitting position could raise his left leg to only 25 percent of what was considered normal height. There was "exquisite tenderness" in his back, and he was suffering from arthritis. Yet he managed to hide all this from everyone but his doctors and intimates.

In 1955 Kennedy had consulted Janet Travell about muscle spasms in his left lower back, which radiated to his left leg and made him unable to "put weight on it without intense pain." He asked her repeatedly about the origin of his back troubles, but she found it impossible "to reconstruct by hindsight what might have happened to him over the years." It was clear to her, however, that Kennedy "resented" the back surgeries, which had brought him no relief and "seemed to only make him worse." He might have done better, of course, to blame the steroids that weakened his bones.

According to the Travell records, the treatments for his various ailments included ingested and implanted DOCA for the Addison's, and large doses of penicillin and other antibiotics to combat the prostatitis and the abscess. He also received injections of procaine at "trigger points" to relieve back pain; anti-spasmodics—principally Lomotil and traserentine—to control the colitis; testosterone to keep up his weight (which fell with each bout of colitis and diarrhea); and Nembutal to help him sleep. He had terribly elevated cholesterol, 410 in one testing, apparently aggravated by the testosterone, which may have added to his stomach and prostate troubles.

Kennedy's collective health problems were not enough to deter him from running for President. Though they were a considerable burden, no one of them impressed him as life-threatening. Nor did he believe that the many medications he took would reduce his ability to work effectively; on the contrary, he saw them as ensuring his competence to deal with the demands of the office. And apparently none of his many doctors told him that were he elevated to the presidency, his health problems (or the treatments for them) could pose a danger to the country.

After reaching the White House, Kennedy believed it was more essential than ever to hide his afflictions. The day after his election, in response to a reporter's question, he declared himself in "excellent" shape and dismissed the rumors of Addison's disease as false. An article based largely on information supplied by Bobby Kennedy echoed JFK's assertions. Published in *Today's Health*, an American Medical Association journal, and summarized in *The New York Times*, the article described JFK as being in "superb physical condition." Though it reported some adrenal insufficiency, it said that a daily oral medication neutralized the problem, and it assured readers that Kennedy would have no problem handling the pressures of the presidency.



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A THOUSAND DAYS OF SUFFERING

During his time in the White House, despite public indications of continuing back difficulties, Kennedy enjoyed an image of robust good health. But according to the Travell records, medical attention was a fixed part of his routine. He was under the care of an allergist, an endocrinologist, a gastroenterologist, an orthopedist, and a urologist, along with that of Janet Travell, Admiral George Burkley, and Max Jacobson, an émigré doctor from Germany who now lived in New York and had made a reputation by treating celebrities with “pep pills,” or amphetamines, that helped to combat depression and fatigue. Jacobson, whom patients called “Dr. Feelgood,” administered amphetamines and back injections of painkillers that JFK believed made him less dependent on crutches.

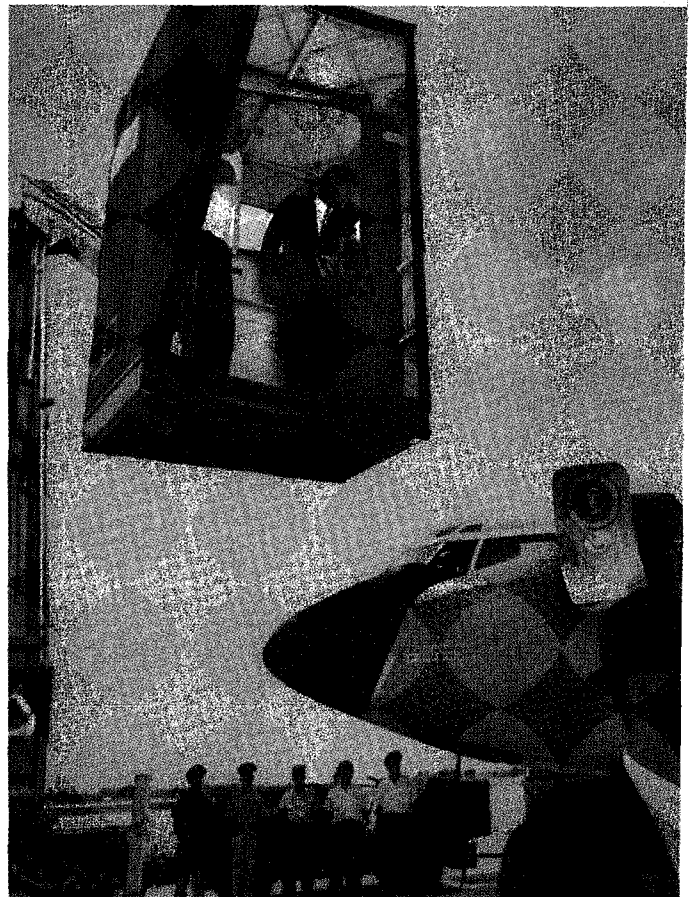
When Kennedy went to France, in June of 1961, to meet Charles de Gaulle, Travell and Burkley accompanied him on *Air Force One*. Unknown to Travell and Burkley, Jacobson flew on a chartered jet to Paris, where he continued giving the President back injections. In addition Travell was injecting him with procaine two or three times a day to relieve his suffering, which in the spring and summer of 1961 had become unbearable. On August 27 she noted in her records that Kennedy’s cry of pain in response to the injections brought Jackie in from another room to see what was wrong. In June of 1961, after Senator George McGovern had expressed sympathy to Bobby about JFK’s suffering, Bobby acknowledged its seriousness. If it were not for Travell’s care during the previous several years, Bobby wrote in response, his brother “would not presently be President of the United States.”

The Travell records reveal that during the first six months of his term, Kennedy suffered stomach, colon, and prostate problems, high fevers, occasional dehydration, abscesses, sleeplessness, and high cholesterol, in addition to his ongoing back and adrenal ailments. His physicians administered large doses of so many drugs that Travell kept a “Medicine Administration Record,” cataloguing injected and ingested corticosteroids for his adrenal insufficiency; procaine shots and ultrasound treatments and hot packs for his back; Lomotil, Metamucil, paregoric, phenobarbital, testosterone, and trasentine to control his diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, and weight loss; penicillin and other antibiotics for his urinary-tract infections and an abscess; and Tuinal to help him sleep. Before press conferences and nationally televised speeches his doctors increased his cortisone dose to deal with tensions harmful to someone unable to produce his own corticosteroids in response to stress. Though the medications occasionally made Kennedy groggy and tired, he did not see them as a problem. He dismissed questions about Jacobson’s injections, saying, “I don’t care if it’s horse piss. It works.”

In 1961 Burkley concluded that the injections, along with back braces and positioning devices that immobilized

Kennedy, were doing him more harm than good. Burkley and some Secret Service men, who observed the President’s difficulties getting up from a sitting position and his reliance on crutches, feared that he would soon be unable to walk and might end up in a wheelchair. Out of sight of the press, Kennedy went up and down helicopter stairs one at a time. After a meeting with JFK, in Bermuda in December of 1961, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan recorded, “In health, I thought the President *not* in good shape. His back is hurting. He cannot sit long without pain.”

In the fall of 1961 Burkley insisted to Travell that Kennedy consult Hans Kraus, an orthopedic surgeon who, like Jacobson, was a European émigré. When Travell resisted



To avoid stairs, JFK rides a cherry picker in 1961

the idea, Burkley threatened to go to the President. Kraus, a brusque Austrian, confirmed Burkley’s worst suspicions: he told Kennedy that if he continued the injections and did not begin regular exercise therapy to strengthen his back and abdominal muscles, he would become a cripple. Fearful that frequent visits by Kraus to supervise such therapy might trigger press inquiries and unwanted speculation, Kennedy was initially reluctant to accept the recommendation. The lost medical kit and the apparent attempts to steal his medical records during the 1960 campaign had put Kennedy on edge about the potential political damage from opponents armed with information about his health problems.

LYNN PELHAM/TIMEPIX

But mindful that ignoring Kraus's advice might eventually result in his being confined to a wheelchair, Kennedy accepted that something had to be done. He and Kraus agreed to describe the therapy sessions as exercises to upgrade the President's condition from very good to excellent. Kennedy then began a regimen of three exercise sessions a week in a small White House gymnasium next to the swimming pool. Limiting Travell's access to the President, Burkley and Kraus used exercises, massage, and heat therapy to ease Kennedy's back spasms and increase his mobility. Performed with his favorite country and western and show tunes playing in the background, the exercise therapy became a respite from the demands that crowded Kennedy's schedule. In the event of an emergency, he had immediate access to Kraus by means of a phone installed in Kraus's car. (Travell, meanwhile, was kept on at the White House so that she wouldn't reveal Kennedy's secrets to the public; if she had been forced out, she might have been tempted to talk.) By January of 1962 Burkley and Kraus saw JFK having a better month than at any time in the previous year. At the end of February they described the past four weeks, "medically speaking," as the "most uneventful month since the inauguration; since the 1960 campaign, for that matter." And in April they pronounced his general condition "excellent."

December, Jackie complained to the President's gastroenterologist, Russell Boles, that the antihistamines for food allergies had a "depressing action" on the President. She asked Boles to prescribe something that would assure "mood elevation without irritation to the gastrointestinal tract." The Travell records reveal that Boles prescribed one milligram twice a day of Stelazine, an anti-psychotic that was also used as a treatment for anxiety. In two days, Kennedy showed marked improvement, and he apparently never needed the drug again.

From the start of his presidency John F. Kennedy had the example of FDR, who had functioned brilliantly despite his paralysis. Roosevelt, however, never needed the combination of medicines on which Kennedy relied to get through the day. When Kennedy ran for and won the presidency, he was in fact gambling that his health problems would not prevent him from handling the job. By hiding the extent of his ailments he denied voters the chance to decide whether they wanted to share this gamble. It is hard to believe that he could have been nominated, much less elected, if the public had known what we now know about his health. Then again, given the way Richard Nixon performed in the White House, how many people would retrospectively offer him their votes for 1960, even knowing of Kennedy's health problems?

DURING HIS PRESIDENCY KENNEDY WAS TAKING STEROIDS FOR ADDISON'S DISEASE, PAINKILLERS FOR HIS BACK, ANTI-SPASMODICS FOR COLITIS, ANTIBIOTICS FOR URINARY-TRACT INFECTIONS, AND ANTIHISTAMINES FOR ALLERGIES.

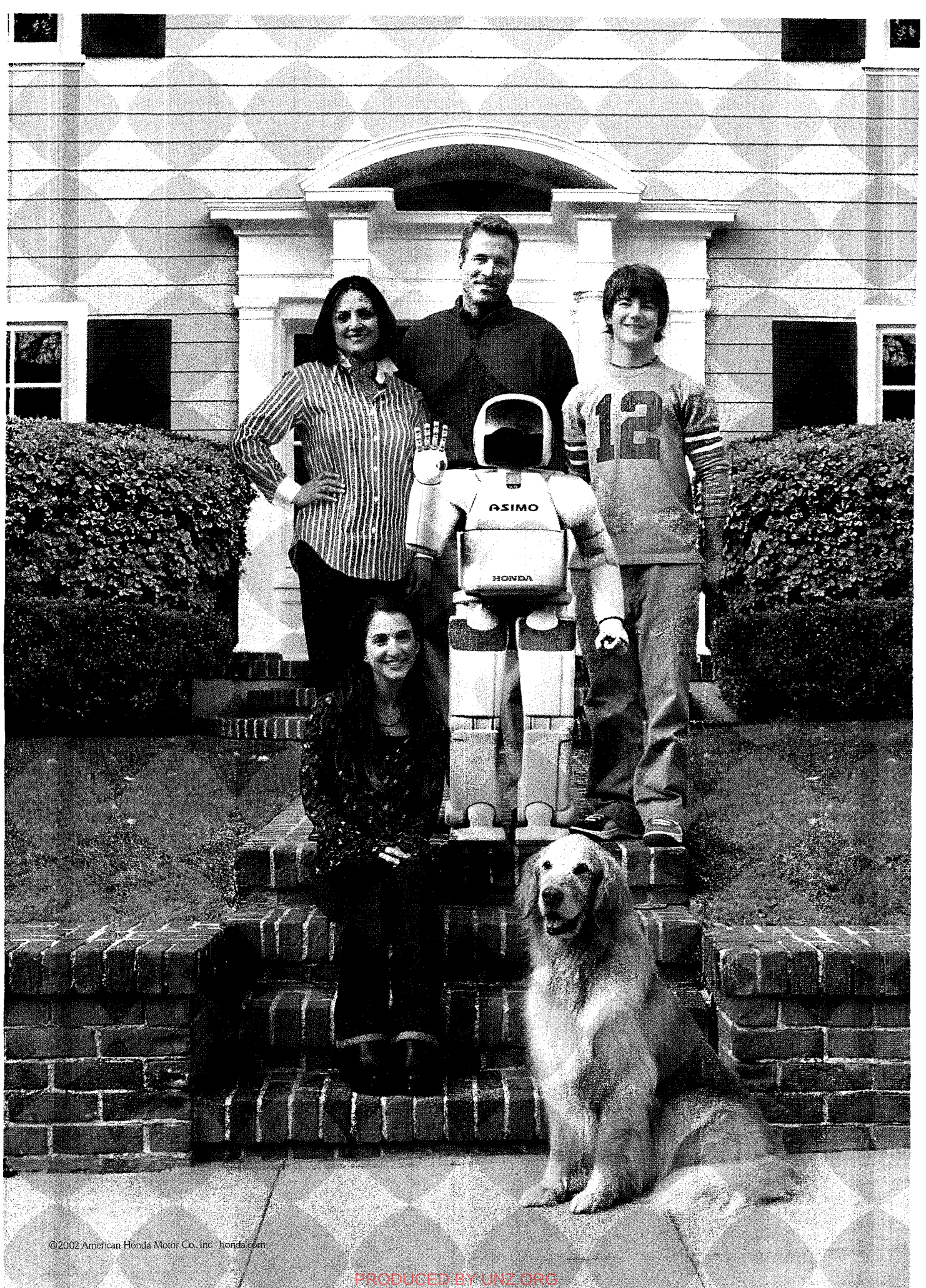
Nevertheless, Kennedy continued to need extensive medication. His condition at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis is a case in point. The Travell records show that during the thirteen days in October of 1962 when Moscow and Washington brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war, Kennedy took his usual doses of anti-spasmodics to control his colitis, antibiotics for a flare-up of his urinary-tract problem and a bout of sinusitis, and increased amounts of hydrocortisone and testosterone, along with salt tablets, to control his Addison's disease and boost his energy. Judging from the tape recordings made of conversations during this time, the medications were no impediment to lucid thought during these long days; on the contrary, Kennedy would have been significantly less effective without them, and might even have been unable to function. But these medications were only one element in helping Kennedy to focus on the crisis; his extraordinary strength of will cannot be underestimated.

This is not to suggest that Kennedy was superhuman, or to exaggerate his ability to endure physical and emotional ills. On November 2, 1962, he took ten additional milligrams of hydrocortisone and ten grains of salt to boost himself before giving a brief report to the American people on the dismantling of the Soviet missile bases in Cuba. In

There is no evidence that JFK's physical torments played any significant part in shaping the successes or shortcomings of his public actions, either before or during his presidency. Prescribed medicines and the program of exercises begun in the fall of 1961, combined with his intelligence, knowledge of history, and determination to manage presidential challenges, allowed him to address potentially disastrous problems sensibly. His presidency was not without failings (the invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs and his slowness to act on civil rights were glaring lapses of judgment), but they were not the result of any physical or emotional impairment.

Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy before the President's medical ailments could. But the evidence suggests that Kennedy's physical condition contributed to his demise. On November 22, 1963, Kennedy was, as always, wearing a corsetlike back brace as he rode through Dallas. Oswald's first bullet struck him in the back of the neck. Were it not for the back brace, which held him erect, the second, fatal shot to the head might not have found its mark. ▀

*Robert Dallek is a professor of history at Boston University. His book *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963*, from which this article is drawn, will be published next fall by Little, Brown. Jeffrey Kelman, M.S., M.D., contributed his medical expertise to the article.*



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OUR GENIUS PROBLEM

*Why this obsession with the word, with the idea,
and with the people on whom we've bestowed the designation?*

BY MARJORIE GARBER

Illustrations by Tim Bower

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During the unexpected and glorious ascendancy of the New England Patriots to pre-eminence in the football world last season, the press was full of the word "genius." As a sports reporter for *The Boston Globe* noted, a computer search had matched "genius" with the Patriots' coach, Bill Belichick, "not once, but more than 200 times." And when the Pats actually defeated the heavily favored St. Louis Rams in the Super Bowl, the *New York Times* headline for the Boston edition, in sixty-point type, read simply "DEFENSIVE GENIUS." The text of the article made it clear that this figure of speech had taken hold. Coach Belichick was likened to a "neighborhood tough guy in a dark alley" who "also has the I.Q. of a nuclear physicist."

Belichick was hardly alone in this peculiar species of gridiron celebrity. The Rams' coach, Mike Martz, was touted as an "offensive genius," the Washington Redskins' newly designated coach, Steve Spurrier, as a "genius strategist," and so on through a parade of sports pages, until even the TV commentators began to call for an end to the hyperbole. And as Belichick's father, a ripe eighty-three years old (and himself a former coach), took time out to observe, "genius" seemed an odd appellation for "somebody who walks up and down a football field."

We live in a time in which all terms and traits are inflated, and even the standard size at Starbucks is a tall. But "genius" appears marked for special inflation, so much so that the term "overrated genius" has begun to seem like a tautology rather than a cautious qualification. What is a genius, anyway? And why does our culture have such an obsession with the word and with the idea?



Genius is fundamentally an eighteenth-century concept, though it has had a good long run through the centuries since. The genius was, and to some extent continues to be, the Romantic hero, the loner, the eccentric, the apotheosis of the individual. The further our society gets from individual agency—the less the individual seems to have real power to change things—the more we idealize the genius, who is by this definition the opposite of the committee or the collaborative enterprise. Indeed, some of the resistance to the idea that Shakespeare wrote his plays in collaboration with other playwrights and even

actors in his company comes from our residual, occasionally desperate, need to retain this ideal notion of the individual genius. We prefer the myth: It was Watson and Crick who discovered DNA—not a whole laboratory of investigators. Edison invented the electric light bulb and the phonograph—never mind that he worked with an extensive team of technicians, mechanics, and scientists.

The pursuit of genius is the pursuit of an illusion. As illusions go, it's among mankind's happier ones—the idea that an individual might have an exceptional and intrinsic talent for art, music, science, mathematics, or something else beneficial to civilization and culture. There's no doubt that such individuals have lived among us throughout history, and have bequeathed to us the legacy of their art and their ideas—but do they constitute an actual class called geniuses? And if so, how can we tell the real ones from the wannabes, the genuine articles from the poseurs?

Over the years we have increasingly tried to analyze, codify, and even quantify "genius," the post-Enlightenment equivalent of sainthood. This wistful quest has itself be-

come a kind of secular religion. Saint Einstein, Saint Newton, Saint Darwin, and Saint Edison have replaced the healers and martyrs of the past, their “miracles” the discoveries of modern science and modern research: relativity, gravity, evolution, electricity.

Artists, musicians, and writers, too, look to the genius standard to separate the “timeless” from the time-bound or the merely timely. In the British novelist Ian McEwan’s Booker Prize-winning novel, *Amsterdam*, a self-absorbed and slightly over-the-hill composer, struggling to write a commissioned symphony, reflects on his musical gifts.

Clive stood from the piano ... and had once more a passing thought, the minuscule fragment of a suspicion that he would not have shared with a single person in the world, would not even have committed to his journal, and whose key word he shaped in his mind only with reluctance; the thought was, quite simply, that it might not be going too far to say that he was ... a genius. A genius. Though he sounded it guiltily on his inner ear, he would not let the word reach his lips. He was not a vain man. A genius. It was a term that had suffered from inflationary overuse, but surely there was a certain level of achievement, a gold standard, that was nonnegotiable, beyond mere opinion.

As it turns out, Clive is mistaken. His *Millennial Symphony*, desperately written in high hopes of praise, is a “drone” of sound even to his own ears; later assessments will call it a “dud,” and note that a melody at the end is a “shameless copy of Beethoven’s Ode to Joy.” A worldly conductor, praising Clive’s past achievements in tacit contrast to his present ones, remarks with unconscious cruelty, “The inventiveness of youth, so hard to recapture, eh, maestro?” The real barb here is that honorific “maestro”: master. Clive has become a public figure and a society success story, but he is further away from genius than he was as a young man.

At this point in history genius has become a commodity, an ambition, and even a lifestyle. Biographers, scholars, critics, and fans spend untold hours trying to nail down a concept that can’t be nailed down, to identify a proof or a marker the way scientists identify genes. At the same time, they seek to “humanize” or “personalize” the story of cultural and intellectual achievement, to make the genius lovable, accessible, and ready for prime time.

Consider an emblematic pair of titles: *Shakespeare in Love* and *Einstein in Love*. The first is the film hit of 1998, with a witty screenplay co-authored by Tom Stoppard; the second is Dennis Overbye’s 2000 biography of the young Albert Einstein. Both portray universally accepted, card-carrying geniuses in moments of offstage intimacy. The movie hy-

pothesizes (cleverly, although entirely at variance with the facts) that Shakespeare’s gift for writing brilliant plays was jump-started when the playwright fell in love with a beautiful, elusive, and ultimately unattainable female aristocrat. Before, he was a hack; afterward, he was a genius. Overbye’s book, more grounded in reality, traces the early life of the winning and self-sufficient Albert as he romances women and ideas. The timing of Einstein’s two major scientific feats, the equation $E=mc^2$ and the general theory of relativity, coincided, respectively, with his marrying Mileva Maric, a Serbian physics student, and his subsequent struggle to divorce Mileva to marry his cousin Elsa.

Both these accounts are to a certain extent charmed by, and charming about, their famous subjects. Each offers a “human” genius, one with quirks, flaws, and feelings. And signally in each case, the tag “in love” alludes, finally, not to the human object of passion but to art or science—to the theater or to the universe.

The later Einstein became a cultural icon, personifying genius in look and name. With his unruly shock of white hair, ambling gait, warm (“absentminded”) smile, and penchant for going sockless, he was a celebrity easy to love, at least from a distance. The Einstein legend, fully established in the mathematician’s lifetime, has persisted long after his death. Walter Matthau (in a fright wig) played him as a warmhearted matchmaker, in a 1994 film called *I.Q.*; a photograph of Einstein, his tongue sticking out, adorns a popular T-shirt; and the famous head is the manifest model for “Chia Prof” in the

Chia Head pottery-planter series. On many computers a shaggy-haired Einstein “office assistant” can be found ready to explain the mysteries of word processing.

Movies about geniuses, if not about genius, are reliably popular, from *Amadeus* to *Good Will Hunting*. Books such as James Gleick’s *Genius: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman* and Sylvia Nasar’s *A Beautiful Mind* become top sellers and beget stage or cinema versions. In those books genius is intertwined with flamboyant eccentricity and iconoclasm. In Peter Parnell’s play *QED*, Feynman, the inventor of quantum electrodynamics, acts in plays, performs on bongo drums, enjoys nude life-drawing and the company of many women, between his work on the atom bomb and his famous diagnosis of what went wrong with the space shuttle *Challenger*. And the mathematician John Forbes Nash, a complicated personality described in Nasar’s biography as having had a child out of wedlock and being attracted to men as well as women, was airbrushed in Ron Howard’s film *A Beautiful Mind* into a heroic one-woman man who triumphed over his schizophrenia—a typical film example of



the “tortured genius.” In real life both men won Nobel prizes; indeed, the transformation of Nobel medal into Oscar statuette seems like a new kind of theatrical alchemy.

Meanwhile, the concept of genius seems broader than ever and ubiquitous. A special end-of-the-millennium issue of *Esquire* (November 1999) was devoted to “genius” and featured articles on the hidden quirks of famous brains from Benjamin Franklin to the physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, a “(This Is Not a) Genius Test,” and a list of twenty-one inventors, creators, and thinkers (“profiles in brilliance”) for the rapidly approaching twenty-first century. “We are lucky,” *Esquire* declared, “to be living in an age of genius.” And who are these geniuses? A computer scientist (Bill Joy), a designer (Tom Ford), an actor (Leonardo DiCaprio), a basketball star (Allen Iverson), a singer (Audra McDonald), a foreign-policy expert (Fareed Zakaria), a chef (Thomas Keller), a novelist (Richard Powers), an entrepreneur (Amazon.com’s Jeff Bezos), an artist (Julie Taymor). Their wealth of accomplishment is undeniable. But do they really deserve to be called geniuses?

At a bookstall in the Amsterdam airport I recently came upon a volume titled *Think Like a Genius: The Ultimate User’s Manual for Your Brain*. Written by Todd Siler, a self-described visual artist, technology specialist, and founder of a company that specializes in innovative learning materials “for fostering integrative thinking in education, business, and the family,” *Think Like a Genius* is made up of the short, punchy sentences that typify self-help books. This passage is from a section called “You Don’t Have to Be a Genius to Think Like One”:

We have been taught that a genius is someone who knows how to think deeply and with originality, an advanced thinker with an expansive mind, such as Plato, Aristotle, or Leonardo da Vinci. We have not been taught that, alongside our most celebrated geniuses, there are legions of everyday geniuses. They’re not people who are mental giants. Nor are they intellectual heroes. Their theories and inventions don’t change cultures or civilizations. But they have all experienced flights of exceptional thinking, often in some highly practical way. Such is the genius behind the invention of paper, Velcro, staples, nails, steel, glass, cement, currency, and other remarkably “simple” but useful things.

What is especially striking about this book—which carries a blurb from the CEO (not yet mayor) Michael Bloomberg and is studded with cartoons, line drawings, four-step exercises, and such advice as “Explore your life from a genius’s perspective,” and “Customize some aspects of genius to fit your way of thinking”—is its suggestion that “genius” has

become an achievable goal, one of spiritual and commercial value. Resistance to exclusivity and privilege is coupled with a can-do spirit. This, in effect, is a manifesto for genius without the geniuses.

WHAT IS “GENIUS”?

The word “genius” derives from the same root as “gene” and “genetic,” and meant originally, in Latin, a tutelary god or spirit given to every person at birth. One’s genius governed one’s fortune and determined one’s character, and ultimately conducted one out of this world into the afterlife. The thinkers of antiquity suggested that every person had two geniuses, one good and one evil, which competed for influence. This concept was alive and well in Shakespeare’s day, and survives in the expression “his better genius.” The word “genius” soon came to mean a demon or spirit in general, as in the fairy-tale “genie” or “jinni.” Genius thus conceived was part of a system that would later be called psychology, because it was thought of as residing somehow both inside and outside the individual, and motivating behavior. Through the Renaissance and well into the eighteenth century the most familiar meaning of “genius” in English was something like “temperament” or “disposition”: people were described as having a “daring genius” or an “indolent genius.”

Joseph Addison’s essay “On Genius,” published in *The Spectator* in 1711, laid out the terrain of genius as we use the term today, to denote exceptional talent

or someone who possesses it. According to Addison, there were two kinds of genius—natural and learned (the greatest of geniuses were the natural ones, whose inborn gifts freed them from dependence on models or imitation). Homer, Pindar, and Shakespeare were his examples of the first category, Aristotle, Virgil, Milton, and Francis Bacon of the second. In general terms this dichotomy—brilliant versus industrious—still underlies our notions of genius today, but despite Thomas Edison’s oft quoted adage “Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration,” it’s the inspiration that we dote on.

In Addison’s day and for years after, the idea of the scientific genius was still for most people a contradiction in terms. Science, then and for years after, was more perspiration than inspiration. Genius was precisely what could never be quantified. As Immanuel Kant contended in his *Critique of Judgment*, genius is a talent for art, not for science, since “it is quite ridiculous for a man to speak and decide like a genius in things which require the most careful investigation by reason.” The spontaneous generation of ideas that apparently



characterizes genius seemed fundamentally at odds with the painstaking labor and analysis that characterize research. "We can readily learn all that Newton has set forth in his immortal work on the *Principles of Natural Philosophy*," Kant declared, "however great a head was required to discover it, but we cannot learn to write spirited poetry." But in England, in the novel *Tom Jones*, Henry Fielding had already poked fun at the notion of unschooled genius.

As several gentlemen in these times, by the wonderful force of genius only, without the least assistance of learning, perhaps, without being well able to read, have made a considerable figure in the republic of letters; the modern critics, I am told, have lately begun to assert, that all kind of learning is entirely useless to a writer; and, indeed, no other than a kind of fetters on the natural spriteliness and activity of the imagination.

It was with the Romantic period that the true cult of the natural genius emerged. At the beginning of the nineteenth century poets and critics such as Coleridge and Shelley, perhaps self-interestedly, staked out genius as the territory of the poet. Shakespeare—or at least the Romantic period's fantasy of Shakespeare—was the quintessential genius, his brilliance and his inventiveness the results of attributes and resources that were innate rather than learned. "Sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child, warbl[ing] his native woodnotes wild" Milton had called him, and this portrait of untutored genius had an enormous effect on critics in the centuries that followed. The less Shakespeare had been taught, the more genius he had—so ran the thinking then, and so, to a certain extent, it continues today. Thus some scholars exulted over Shakespeare's supposed lack of formal education: he attended only a rural grammar school, not a university; he had, as his admiring rival Ben Jonson indelibly phrased it, "small Latin and less Greek"—though in point of fact the curriculum of the Stratford grammar school, rich in history and mythology, offered a solid training in the classics.

The Romantics differed among themselves in their estimation of Shakespeare's style and his degree of learning, trying in various ways to explain the causes of the poet's supposed barbarisms, separating what they judged his timeless genius from the unfortunate fact that he lived and wrote in a cruder age. William Hazlitt, an influential critic and essayist, catalogued the playwright's imperfections, including his irritating fondness for puns and wordplay and his unaccountable willingness to alter chronology and geography to suit his dramatic purposes. But these flaws did not detract, in Hazlitt's view, from what he deemed Shakespeare's unique genius: "His barbarisms were those of his age. His genius was his own."

Coleridge, on the other hand, argued in a lecture forth-

rightly titled "Shakespeare's Judgment Equal to His Genius" that the plays were more than "works of rude uncultivated genius." Their form, he thought, was "equally admirable with the matter; the judgment of the great poet not less deserving of our wonder than his genius." Here the word "wonder" underscores Shakespeare's quasi-miraculous achievement. Judgement—in his case, unlike so many others—is not an element that contradicts genius but, rather, a virtue, equally unfathomable, that serves as its complement.

The cult of genius inherited from these Romantic writers, one that still has enormous force today, tells us that ordinary mortals can achieve many things by dint of hard work, but the natural and effortless gifts of a true genius (like Shakespeare) will forever elude the diligent overachiever. By this logic genius, and geniuses, cannot be made, only born.

GENIUS AND ABERRATION

The Romantics found genius not only in the supposedly wild and uncultivated Shakespeare but also in the poets and personalities of their own period—in the extravagant Byron and the intense and charismatic Shelley. The perhaps inevitable next step was for an artist to announce his own genius, as did that great self-promoter and fearless breaker of cultural taboos, Oscar Wilde. Flush with celebrity as London's leading "aesthete," Wilde arrived in New York in January of 1882 for a triumphal tour of the United States; he is said to have announced to Customs officials, "I



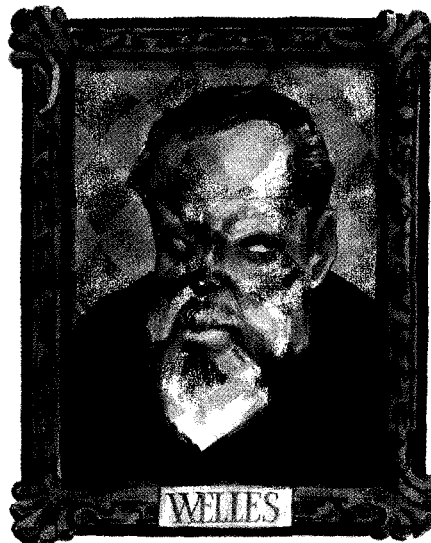
have nothing to declare except my genius." Thus genius became not merely a synonym for exalted intellectual power but a performed role. With his ostentatious clothing, his green carnations, his witty epigrams, and his flair for publicity, Wilde became the avatar of self-proclaimed genius.

Where Wilde dared to tread, others followed. Gertrude Stein, with a personality as obtrusive in its way as Wilde's, would claim the mantle of genius for the so-called "lost generation" of Americans who had taken up residence in Europe during the early years of the twentieth century. As Stein wrote in her autobiography, ventriloquized through the voice of her companion and secretary, Alice B. Toklas, "The geniuses came and talked to Gertrude Stein and the wives sat with me. How they unroll, an endless vista through the years ... geniuses, near geniuses and might be geniuses, all having wives, and I have sat and talked with them, all the wives and later on, well later on too, I have sat and talked with all." On one occasion Stein proclaimed that the Jews had produced "only three originaive geniuses—Christ, Spinoza, and myself," a remark recorded in Robert McAlmon's memoir, titled *Being Geniuses Together*.

Over the years there have been pockets of resistance to throwing the term around lightly. "Among scientists," James Gleick writes in his biography of Feynman, "it became a kind of style violation, a faux pas suggesting greenhorn credulity, to use the word *genius* about a living colleague." But in her biography of Nash, Sylvia Nasar uses it relentlessly and unselfconsciously, on page after page, to refer to a whole bevy of mathematicians. Her book includes references to "Nash the mathematical genius," to "the two geniuses" Nash and his fellow scientist John von Neumann, to Norbert Wiener as "a genius who was at once adulated and isolated," and to the "group of geniuses" in mathematics and theoretical physics who came to the United States from Europe in the years before and during World War II. Not only does Nasar revel in using the word but she delights in summoning up the attributes and symptoms of genius. She writes that "[Nash's] arrogance was seen as evidence of his genius," that "a profound dislike for merely absorbing knowledge and a strong compulsion to learn by doing is one of the most reliable signs of genius," and that "Nash picked up the mannerisms of other eccentric geniuses" at MIT, appropriating as his own Wiener's gesture of running his finger along grooves in the tiled walls of the corridors. She also cites D. J. Newman's condemnation of music after Beethoven, Norman Levinson's dislike of psychiatrists, and Warren Ambrose's impatience with conventional social greetings.

For Nasar and other true believers, the bona fide genius solves problems whole with spontaneous outbursts of inspiration, rather than working them through step by step, or equation by equation, like the rest of us. Nasar often describes Nash as brooding intensely over a topic before finally approaching it from an unexpected angle, startling his colleagues. She writes that he seldom read the works of other mathematicians or engaged in any preparatory research, preferring to come at problems afresh.

The eccentric genius is especially familiar to readers of detective fiction, in which such titans as Sherlock Holmes and Nero Wolfe best their plodding competitors by sheer force of mind and gift for idiosyncrasy. Holmes, with his pipe, his violin, his cocaine habit, his melancholy, his diverse and erudite publications (on topics from motets to shag tobacco, from the ancient Cornish language to bee culture), his avoidance of women, and his disdain for ordinary police work, is a classic embodiment of the genius, as is Wolfe, a portly polymath, didact, gourmand, beer drinker, and orchid fancier, who also avoids women and the ordinary investigative methods of the police. "I have no talents," Wolfe declares with customary insouciance. "I have genius or nothing."



Eccentricity has become such a strong identifying mark of genius that the very notion of a non-eccentric genius seems like a contradiction in terms. Thus in the genius sweepstakes we are drawn to Eugene O'Neill over Arthur Miller, Emily Dickinson over Felicia Hemans, Edgar Allan Poe over Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and, of course, Mozart over Salieri. General Leslie Groves was delighted to find that his top scientist on the Manhattan Project, Robert Oppenheimer, was fluent in Sanskrit. "To physicists, Oppenheimer's command of Sanskrit seemed a curiosity," James Gleick writes in his biography of Feynman. "To General Groves, it was another sign of genius." *Esquire's* "genius" issue included a list of "eccentricities" gleaned from pop biographies of "seven bona fide geniuses," in which readers learned, for example, that Orson Welles supposedly wanted to play the lead in the rock opera *Tommy*, that Miles Davis wore his underpants back-

wards, and that Oppenheimer, after he lost his security clearance, drank lead paint to "make [himself] stupider." Sometimes the element of eccentricity seems to crowd out everything else, including the subject's actual achievements—threatening to make genius almost entirely a theatrical role.

The growing perception in the nineteenth century of an inextricable link between genius and eccentricity led some to speculate about a possible connection to a darker form of anomaly: insanity. The English eugenicist Francis Galton expressed deep concern about such pathological undercurrents in his 1869 book *Hereditary Genius*.

If genius means a sense of inspiration, or of rushes of ideas from apparently supernatural sources, or of an inordinate and burning desire to accomplish any particular end, it is perilously near to the voices heard by the insane, to their delirious tendencies, or to their monomanias. It cannot in such cases be a healthy faculty, nor can it be desirable to perpetuate it by inheritance.

Another British physician who took the insanity question seriously was Havelock Ellis. In his *A Study of British Genius* (1904) he classified geniuses in a number of different ways: those who were insane during a considerable portion of their lives (John Clare, William Collins, William Cowper, Christopher Smart); those who were either briefly insane or died young, sometimes by suicide (George L. Fox, Charles Lamb, Dante Gabriel Rossetti); those who became insane only at the ends of their long lives, suffering from senile dementia (Robert Southey, Jonathan Swift); and those who exhibited "marked eccentricity not amounting to insanity" (James Boswell, Laurence Oliphant). Ellis paused over the case of William Blake, noting a contemporary doctor's view that if the story of Blake's sitting naked in his

summer house with his wife was to be believed, “he was certainly insane.” In the end, however, Ellis’s findings seemed to refute the notion of an ineluctable tie between genius and insanity. According to his tabulations, only 4.2 percent of his “men of genius” could be counted as insane by any of his criteria. “We must put out of court any theory as to genius being a form of insanity,” he concluded.

While the likes of Galton and Ellis were investigating the relationship between genius and insanity, others were looking closely at geniuses for different forms of aberration. The Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, best known for alleging (in *The Criminal Man*, 1876) that certain physical types were “born criminals,” followed up this study of human transgression with a parallel study of human achievement, *The Man of Genius* (1888), in which he asserted that genius was related both to moral degeneracy (manifested variously as apathy, impulsiveness, sexual excess, morbid vanity, excessive mutism or verbosity, the tendency to put mystical interpretations on the simplest facts) and to certain physical characteristics (prominent ears, deficiency of beard, shortness of stature, left-handedness, pallor, stammering, sterility).

Sixty years later the British physician W. R. Bett devoted an entire volume to what he called “the infirmities of genius,” with geniuses and their afflictions neatly paired: “Percy Bysshe Shelley: Neurosis and Genius”; “Algernon Charles Swinburne: Epilepsy and Genius”; “Honoré de Balzac: High Blood Pressure and Genius”; “Charles Baudelaire: Syphilis, Drugs, and Genius”; “Robert Burns: Rheumatic Fever and Genius”; “Lord Byron: Lameness and Genius,” and so on. Lafcadio Hearn was called “The Disfigured Genius who Worshipped Beauty.” In his preface Bett announced his project in an uncompromising way: “This book is almost exclusively concerned with abnormal people—with the psychopathology of genius.”

QUANTIFYING GENIUS

With the invention of the intelligence quotient, or IQ, came the idea that genius could be quantified. Not surprisingly, this undermined the traditional Romantic vision of the genius as a different kind of being; it was the end of genius’s aura.

It’s not surprising either that IQ was the invention of an American—Lewis Terman, a psychology professor at Stanford who thought up this device for the scientific assessment of mental capacity at the beginning of the twentieth century. The French psychologist Alfred Binet had in 1905 developed a test for measuring the ability to think and reason, apart from education in any field. He gave the test to Paris

schoolchildren, and arrived at the idea of a “mental age,” which was based on the percentage of people who could pass a particular test geared for that age. Terman, adapting Binet’s method, divided a test taker’s mental age by his actual age times one hundred to arrive at the intelligence quotient. The idea was that the population might be sorted by intelligence and funneled into appropriate levels of schooling, suitable jobs, and so forth—all this decades before Nazi science made such categorizations invidious. Inductees into the U.S. Army during World War I were routinely given IQ tests. Britain’s “11-plus exams,” adopted in 1944, were an attempt to track students by intelligence and merit, and thus to contravene the old class system.

In 1921 Terman and his research team, through statewide testing in California, identified a group of 1,528 high-testing youngsters, whom newspapers called the “1,000 Gifted

Children” or the “little geniuses” or, inevitably, the “Termites.” Studied over the next eight decades, this group revealed a median IQ of 147, with some scores above 190. It included descendants of Benjamin Franklin, John and John Quincy Adams, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, P. T. Barnum, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Mark Twain. It also included Terman’s two children. The results of the study were in some ways underwhelming. “There wasn’t a Nobel laureate,” Terman’s successor, Albert H. Hastorf, a former Stanford provost, reported. “There wasn’t a Pulitzer Prize. We didn’t have a Picasso. It’s my guess that Terman was a little bit disappointed.” Many in

the group went on to become doctors and lawyers, but the label “genius” eluded them as adults. Perhaps the most famous members were the Hollywood director Edward Dmytryk; the creator of *I Love Lucy*, Jess Oppenheimer; and the physiologist Ancel Keys, inventor of the portable meal called the K-ration, who was the only one of the “little geniuses” to wind up on the cover of *Time* or *Life*.

Nonetheless, the notion that there was such a thing as an IQ—and, indeed, such a thing as a “genius-level IQ”—had taken hold in the popular imagination. Thus the gossip columnist who writes a weekly feature called “Walter Scott’s Personality Parade” for *Parade Magazine* referred to George H.W. Bush’s chief of staff John Sununu as “a brilliant academician with a genius-level IQ.” But, as *The Washington Post* noted, Sununu’s IQ seemed to be constantly on the increase: it was reported as 170 when he was governor of New Hampshire and as “a genius IQ of 176” at the time of the Bush inaugural; William Safire described Sununu as a “quasi-genius, reportedly with an intelligence quotient of 180.” The 180 was subsequently invoked by almost every



commentator in the press. If an abrasive and strong-willed politico like Sununu, whose IQ score was said to have been based on his responses to a quiz published in *Omni* magazine, was a new type of genius, what did that say about the transcendent cachet that seemed formerly to have attached to that troublesome, enigmatic, and increasingly elusive term? The idea that genius could be quantified and placed on a continuum with ordinary intelligence—that the genius was just like everyone else, only smarter—was at odds with the Romantic notion of the genius as fundamentally different. Yet both ideas proved irresistible.

Once the IQ test had been developed to measure intelligence in the living, it was almost inevitable that someone should wish to test the dead. Social scientists, working under the direction of Lewis Terman, set out to ascertain the IQs of history's most famous geniuses. Terman himself, confessing his lifelong interest in "the childhood of genius," focused on Francis Galton, the author of *Hereditary Genius*, saying that "any psychologist who is familiar with the age norms of mental development" would recognize various details from Galton's biography as "convincing proof that Galton as a child had an intelligence quotient not far from 200; in other words, that his 'mental age' was about twice his actual age."

Much of the excitement about IQ was linked to the growing popularity of the idea of "meritocracy"; instead of a hereditary aristocracy of the titled and the entitled, there would now be a new, more deserving upper class of eminent or soon to be eminent achievers. The notion that a test—any test—could be completely objective in measuring merit and intelligence faced challenges. In the second half of the twentieth century numerous attacks were made on the IQ system, which was regarded by some as inadvertently prejudicial. The anti-IQ forces were exemplified by J. L. Dillard, who criticized "an intelligence-testing procedure which is completely invalid because of its cultural and linguistic bias." Yet the allure of quantifying genius remained as strong as that of genius itself.

BANKING ON GENIUS

Since Lewis Terman's rigorous IQ testing had somehow failed to predict Nobel laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners, and Picassos, the next step for a culture enraptured by the idea of genius was to find a means of identifying people of such potential and then helping them to use their gifts.

Since 1981 the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation has given out what the press insists on labeling "genius grants" to artists, performers, architects, scientists, and scholars of all persuasions. The twenty-four recipients

for 2002, for instance, include a trombonist, a physicist and Internet publisher, a computational linguist, a documentary filmmaker, a glass-bead artist, a children's book author, a paleo-ethnobotanist who studies fossilized plant remains, a seismologist and disaster-prevention specialist, and a roboticist. MacArthur fellows are chosen for their "individual leadership, initiative, and creativity," according to the foundation's president, Jonathan F. Fanton. The foundation, which emphasizes "the importance of the creative individual in society," scrupulously avoids the G word. Where genius actually enters the picture is more in the intentions and fantasies of the program's founder, J. Roderick MacArthur—the son of John D. MacArthur, a financial wizard who parlayed an insurance firm into an empire that included Florida real estate, New York office buildings, and pulp-and-paper factories.



"The idea behind this," Roderick MacArthur explained when the fellows program was begun, "is that Albert Einstein could not have written a grant application saying he was going to discover the theory of relativity. He needed to be free." Recipients have not tendered applications; nor do they submit progress reports after they receive their grants. "There was no management association looking at Michelangelo and asking him to fill out semi-yearly progress reports in triplicate," MacArthur said. "Our aim is to support individual genius and to free those people from the bureaucratic pettiness of academe."

Leaving aside the patronage battles and myriad stresses and strains that did hamper Michelangelo, Einstein, and other geniuses of the past (not to mention the vexatious question of whether the obstacles they encountered perversely contributed to their achievements), what is most striking here is the persistence of the Romantic assumption that geniuses "need to be free." Or perhaps, if we hark back to the notion of genius as an attribute rather than a person, that freedom encourages people to develop their genius.

Another recent effort to foster genius is the Repository for Germinal Choice—the "genius" sperm bank founded in Escondido, California, by the eyeglass millionaire Robert Klark Graham. For twenty years the sperm bank, also described as a "genius baby farm," produced hundreds of designer babies sired by men of proven high intelligence, at least three of the initial donors were Nobel Prize winners. "There is nothing wrong with trying to improve the human race," said Graham, who died in 1997. "Think of all the gains we could have from dozens of children fathered by a Thomas Edison or Albert Einstein."

OUR GENIUS COMPLEX

It is ironic that scientific objectivism about genius is mingled with a strong remnant of what looks like religious faith. The fact is that we cannot bring ourselves to renounce the dream of the superhuman, whether that superhumanity comes in an explicitly religious form or in the post-Enlightenment guise of artistic or scientific genius. Who can forget the story of Einstein's brain—weighed, preserved, for some time inexplicably lost, and finally the object of a scientific custody battle? What was the anomaly that made for his genius? Was the brain of exceptional size? Did it have other signifying traits? As the critic Roland Barthes put it, "Einstein's brain is a mythical object." Old photographs show Einstein cheerfully submitting to testing, his head wreathed with electrical wires, his brain waves mechanically recorded while he was instructed to think of relativity. "Paradoxically," Barthes wrote, "the more the genius of the man was materialized under the guise of his brain, the more the product of his inventiveness came to acquire a magical dimension, and gave a new incarnation to the old esoteric image of a science entirely contained in a few letters." For Barthes, the essence of Einstein's genius was captured in the contrast between photographs of the scientist "standing next to a blackboard covered with mathematical signs of obvious complexity" and cartoons that showed him "chalk still in hand, and having just written on an empty blackboard, as if without preparation, the magic formula of the world."

Deep within us lies a certain strain of longing for genius, a genius worship, that might be described as messianic: the

hope that a genius will come along to save us from our technological, philosophical, spiritual, or aesthetic impasse. Is there anything wrong with cherishing this ideal?

What all the IQ tests, brain measurements, and supposed telltale pathologies show is that genius in a particular case can't be proved to exist, much less effectively predicted. It's not that there is no such thing as genius but, rather, that genius is an assessment or an accolade often retrospectively applied to an individual or an idea—not an identifiable essence.

The words we use shape the way we think. "Genius" has become too easy a word for us to say. The parallel here may in fact be addiction rather than religion: as a culture, we have become increasingly addicted to the idea of genius, so we are dependent on it for a certain kind of emulative high, an intoxication with the superlative. Nowadays it takes more and more genius, or more and more geniuses, to satisfy our craving. It may be time to go cold turkey for a while, to swear off the genius model to represent our highest aspirations for intellectual or artistic innovation. If we remind ourselves that what is really at stake is creativity and invention; if we can learn to separate the power of ideas from that of personality; then perhaps we will be less dazzled by the light of celebrity and less distracted by attempts to lionize the genius as a high-culture hero—as essence rather than force. It's not just another word that we need; it's another way of thinking about thinking. ▀

Marjorie Garber is a professor of English and the director of the Humanities Center at Harvard University. She is the author of Sex and Real Estate (2000), Academic Instincts (2001), and the forthcoming Quotation Marks.

THE WORKOUT

Each autumn, in the
time-honored tradition,
Helen breaks a switch from
the dusky heart of an olive tree
and trots her sows down
the furrows. It is trotting,
not lounging, that makes
prime porker poundage,
that stirs the blood and
flushes the blackbirds out
of the vineyards, that beats
the deep drum of the earth

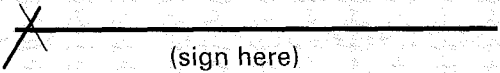
with hard, pointed toes,
quickenening the pulse.
And it is trotting
that renders the ladies lean
and marketable. A fly
warbles into the soft
flap of a sow's ear:

*The mad pigs of Sarlat
ran amok at the fair,
drank all the wine, trampled
the poor auctioneer, tra-la...*

But Helen slaps their rumps,
charging them up one row,
down another, until they are
winded and smiling.
The sun stands high
above, and their shadows
unfurl behind them
like crisp blue ribbons.

—ROBERTA SPEAR

Roberta Spear is the author of three collections of poetry, Silks (1980), Taking to Water (1985), and The Pilgrim Among Us (1991).

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GRADE A: THE MARKET FOR A YALE WOMAN'S EGGS

When a Yale undergraduate explored becoming an egg donor for a wealthy couple willing to pay top dollar to the right candidate, she didn't realize how unsettling the process of candidacy would prove to be

BY JESSICA COHEN

.....

Early in the spring of last year a classified ad ran for two weeks in the *Yale Daily News*: "EGG DONOR NEEDED." The couple that placed the ad was picky, and for that reason was offering \$25,000 for an egg from the right donor.

As a child I had a book called "*Where Did I Come From?*" It offered a full biological explanation, in cartoons, to answer those awkward questions that curious tots ask. But the book is now out of date. Replacing it is, for example, *Mommy, Did I Grow in Your Tummy?: Where Some Babies Come From*, which explains the myriad ways that children of the twenty-first century may have entered their families, including egg donation, surrogacy, *in vitro* fertilization, and adoption. When conception doesn't occur in the natural way, it becomes very complicated. Once all possible parties have been accounted for—egg donor, sperm donor, surrogate mother, paying couple—as many as five people can be involved in conceiving and carrying a child. No wonder a new book is necessary.

The would-be parents' decision to advertise in the *News*—and to offer a five-figure compensation—immediately suggested that they were in the market for an egg of a certain rarefied type. Beyond their desire for an Ivy League donor, they wanted a young woman over five feet five, of Jewish heritage, athletic, with a minimum combined SAT score of 1500, and attractive. I was curious—and I fit all the criteria except the SAT score. So I e-mailed Michelle and David (not their real names) and asked for more information about the process and how much the SAT minimum really meant to them. Then I waited for a reply.

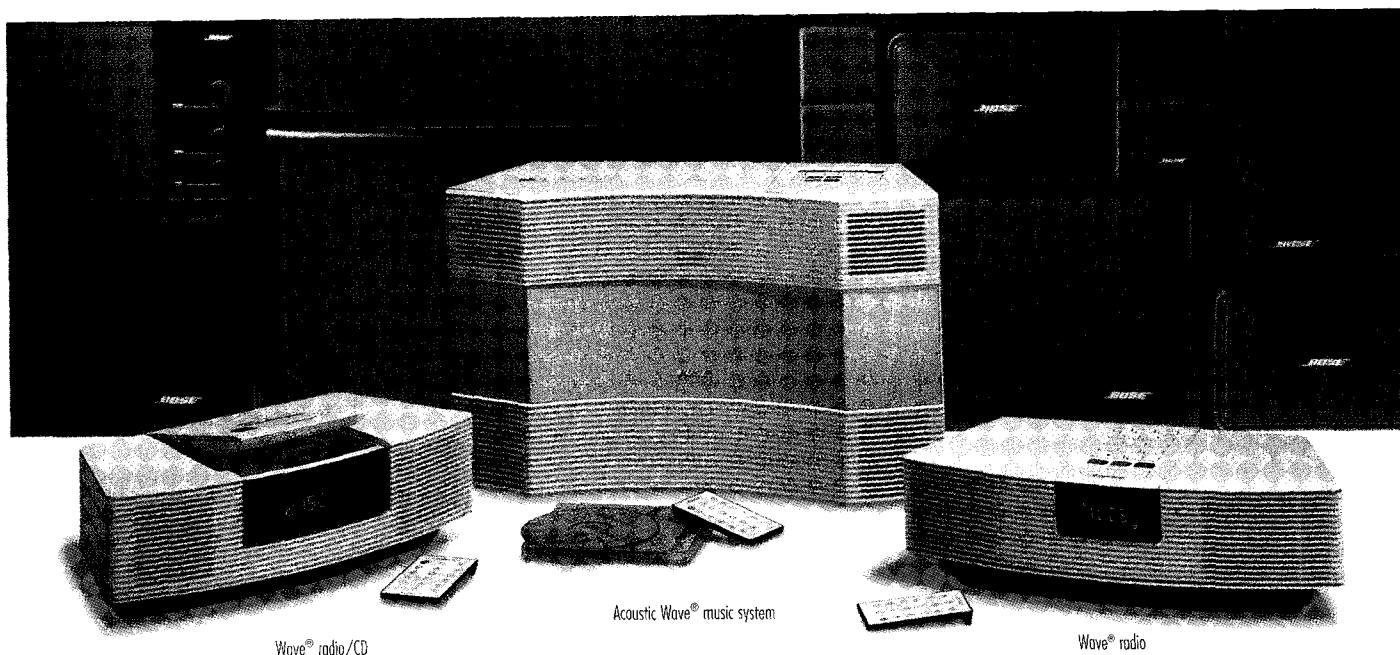
Donating an egg is neither simple nor painless. Following an intensive screening and selection process the donor endures a few weeks of invasive medical procedures. First the donor and the woman who will carry the child must coordinate their menstrual cycles. Typically the donor and the recipient take birth-control pills, followed by shots of a synthetic hormone such as Lupron; the combination suppresses ovulation and puts their cycles in sync. After altering

her cycle the donor must enhance her egg supply with fertility drugs in the same way an infertile woman does when trying to conceive. Shots of a fertility hormone are administered for seven to eleven days, to stimulate the production of an abnormally large number of egg-containing follicles. During this time the donor must have her blood tested every other day so that doctors can monitor her hormone levels, and she must come in for periodic ultrasounds. Thirty-six hours before retrieval day a shot of hCG, human chorionic gonadotropin, is administered to prepare the eggs for release, so that they will be ready for harvest.

The actual retrieval is done while the donor is under anesthesia. The tool is a needle, and the product, on average, is ten to twenty eggs. Doctors take that many because "not all eggs will be good," according to Surrogate Mothers Online, an informational Web site designed and maintained by experienced egg donors and surrogate mothers. "Some will be immature and some overripe."

Lisa, one of the hosts on Surrogate Mothers Online and an experienced egg donor, described the process as a "rewarding" experience. When she explained that once in a while something can go wrong, I braced myself for the fine print. On very rare occasions, she wrote, hyperstimulation of the ovaries can occur, and the donor must be hospitalized until the ovaries return to normal. In even rarer cases the ovaries rupture, resulting in permanent infertility or possibly even death. "I must stress that this is very rare," Lisa assured prospective donors. "I had two very wonderful experiences ... The second [time] I stayed awake to help the doctor count how many eggs he retrieved."

David responded to my e-mail a few hours after I'd sent it. He told me nothing about himself, and only briefly alluded to the many questions I had asked about the egg-donation process. He spent the bulk of the e-mail describing a cartoon, and then requested photos of me. The cartoon was a scene with a "couple that is just getting married, he a nerd and she a beauty," he wrote. "They are kvelling about how wonderful their offspring will be with his brains and her looks." He went



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on to describe the punch line: the next panel showed a nerdy-looking baby thinking empty thoughts. The following paragraph was more direct. David let me know that he and his wife were flexible on most criteria but that Michelle was “a real Nazi” about “donor looks and donor health history.”

This seemed to be a commentary of some sort on the couple’s situation and how plans might go awry, but the message was impossible to pin down. I thanked him for the e-mail, asked where to send my pictures, and repeated my original questions about egg donation and their criteria.

In a subsequent e-mail David promised to return my photos, so I sent him dorm-room pictures, the kind that every college student has lying around.

Now they assumed a new level of importance. I would soon learn what this anonymous couple, somewhere in the United States, thought about my genetic material as displayed in these photographs.

Infertility is not a modern problem, but it has created a modern industry. Ten percent of American couples are infertile, and many seek treatment from the \$2-billion-a-year infertility industry. The approximately 370 fertility clinics across the United States help prospective parents to sift through their options. I sympathize with women who cannot use their own eggs to have children. The discovery must be a sober awakening for those who have always dreamed of raising a family. When would-be parents face this problem, however, their options depend greatly on their income. All over the world most women who can’t have children must simply accept the fact and adopt, or find other roles in society. But especially here in the United States wealth can enable such couples to have a child of their own and to determine how closely that child will resemble the one they might have had—or the one they dream of having.

The Web site of Egg Donation, Inc., a program based in California, contains a database listing approximately 300 potential donors. In order to access the list interested parties must call the company and request the user ID and the password for the month. Once I’d given the receptionist my name and address, she told me the password: “colorful.” I hung up and entered the database. Potential parents can search for a variety of features, narrowing the pool as much as they like according to ethnic origin, religion of birth, state of residence, hair color, eye color, height, and weight. I typed in the physical and religious characteristics that Michelle and

David were looking for and found four potential donors. None of them had a college degree.

The standard compensation for donating an egg to Egg Donation is \$3,500 to \$5,000, and additional funds are offered to donors who have advanced degrees or are of Asian, African-American, or Jewish descent. Couples searching for an egg at Egg Donation can be picky, but not as picky as couples advertising in the *Yale Daily News*. Should couples be able to pay a premium on an open market for their idea of the perfect egg? Maybe a modern-day Social Darwinist would say yes. Modern success is measured largely in financial terms, so why shouldn’t the most successful couples, eager to pay more, have access to the most expensive eggs? Of course, as David illustrated in his first e-mail, input does not always translate perfectly into output—the donor’s desirable characteristics may never actually be manifested in the child.

If couples choose not to find their eggs through an agency, they must do so independently. An Internet search turned up a few sites like Surrogate Mothers Online, where would-be donors and parents can post classified ads. More than 500 classifieds were posted on the site: a whole marketplace, an eBay for genetic material.

“Hi! My name is Kimberly,” one of the ads read. “I am 24 years old, 5’11” with blonde hair and green eyes. I previously donated eggs and the couple was blessed with BIG twin boys! The doctor told me I have perky ovaries! ... The doctor told me I had the most perfect eggs he had ever seen.” The Web site provided links to photographs of Kimberly and an e-mail address. Would-be

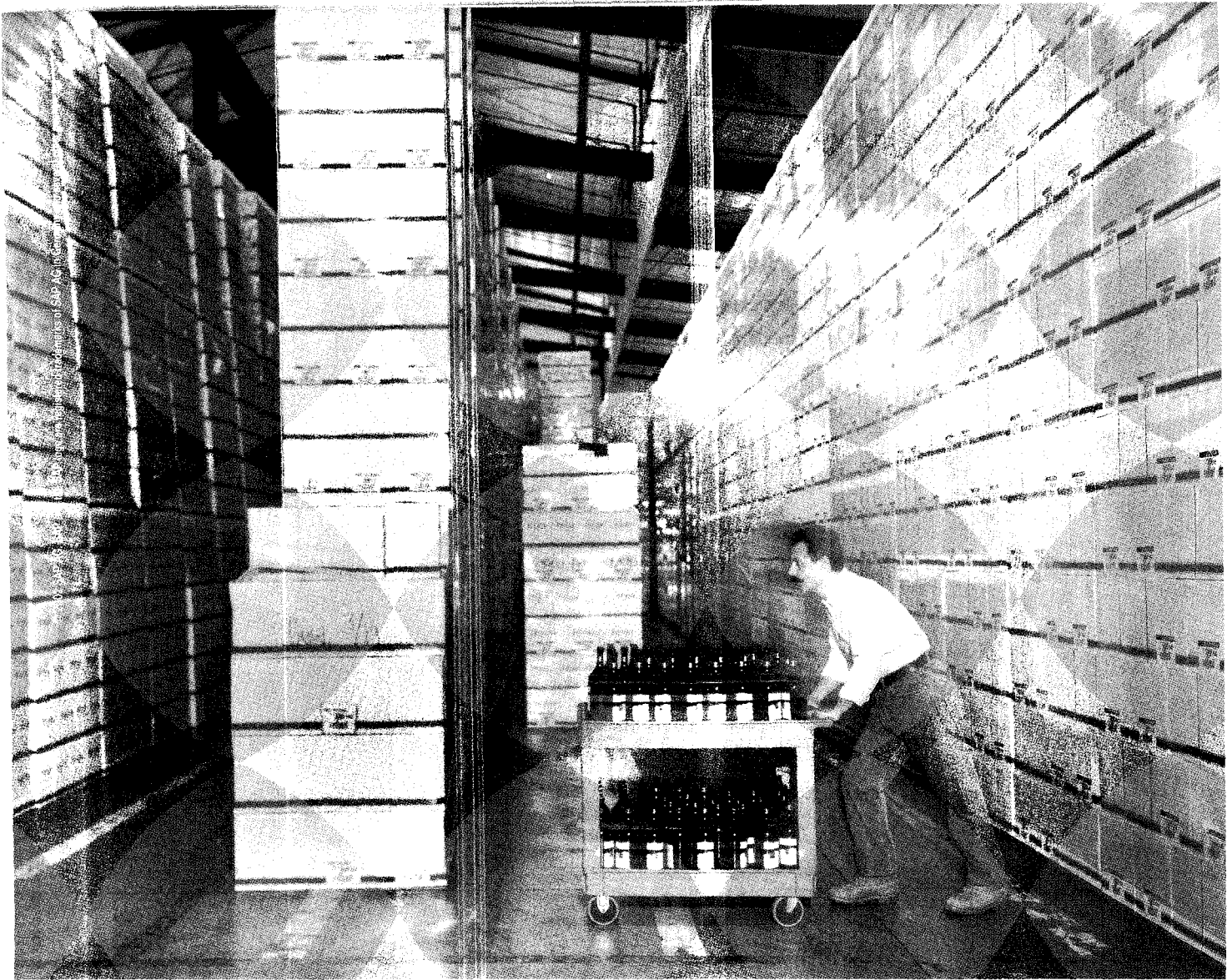
parents on the site offered “competitive” rates, generally from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for donors who fit their specifications.

About a week after I sent my pictures to David and Michelle, I received a third e-mail: “Got the pictures. You look perfect. I can’t say this with any authority. That is my wife’s department.” I thought back to the first e-mail, where he’d written, “She’s been known to disregard a young woman based on cheekbones, hair, nose, you name it.” He then shifted the focus. “My department is the SAT scores. Can you tell me more about your academic performance? What are you taking at Yale? What high school did you attend?”

The whole thing seemed like a joke. I dutifully answered his questions, explaining that I was from a no-name high school in the Midwest, I couldn’t do math or science,



The author at age five, with her brother, and at age nineteen



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and my academic performance was, well, average; I couldn't help feeling a bit disconcerted by his particular interest in my SAT score.

Michelle and David now had my educational data as well as my photos. They were examining my credentials and trying to imagine their child. If I was accepted, a harvest of my eggs would be fertilized by the semen of the author of the disturbing e-mails I had received. A few embryos would be implanted; the remaining, if there were any, would be frozen; and then I would be out of the picture forever.

The modern embryo has been frozen, stolen, aborted, researched, and delivered weeks early, along with five or six instant siblings. The summer of 2001 was full of embryo news, and the first big story was President Bush's deliberation on stem-cell research. The embryos available for genetic research include those frozen by fertility clinics for later use by couples attempting *in vitro* fertilization.

Embryos took the spotlight again when Helen Beasley, a surrogate mother from Shrewsbury, England, decided to sue a San Francisco couple for parental rights to the twin fetuses she was carrying. The couple and Beasley had agreed that they would pay her \$20,000 to carry one child created from a donated egg and the father's sperm. The agreement also called for selective reduction—the abortion of any additional embryos. Beasley claimed that there had been a verbal agreement that such reduction would occur by the twelfth week. The problem arose when Beasley, who had discovered she was carrying twins, was told to abort one, but the arrangements for the reduction weren't made until the thirteenth week. Fearing for her own health and objecting to the abortion of such a highly developed fetus, she refused. At that time she was suing for the right to put the babies up for adoption. She was also seeking the remainder of the financial compensation specified in the contract. The couple did not want the children, and yet had the rights to the genetic material; Beasley was simply a vessel. The case is only one of a multitude invited by modern fertility processes. On August 15, 2001, *The New York Times* reported that the New Jersey Supreme Court had upheld a woman's rights to the embryos that she and her ex-husband had created and frozen six years before. A strange case for child-custody lawyers.

Nearly ten years ago, at the University of California at Irvine's Center for Reproductive Health, doctors took the leftover frozen embryos from previous clients and gave them without consent to other couples and to research centers. Discovery of the scam resulted in more than thirty prosecutions: a group of children had biological parents who hadn't consented to their existence and active parents who had been given stolen goods. Who can say whether throwing the embryos away would have been any better?

Even if Michelle and David liked my data, I knew I'd have a long way to go before becoming an actual donor. The application on Egg Donation's Web site is twelve pages long—

longer than Yale's entrance application. The first two pages cover the basics: appearance, name, address, age, and other mundane details. After that I was asked if I'd ever filed for bankruptcy or ever had counseling, if I drank, what my goals in life were, what two of my favorite books were, what my paternal grandfather's height and weight were, what hobbies I had, what kind of relationship I would want to have with the parents and child, and so forth. A few fill-in-the-blanks were thrown in at the end: "I feel strongly about _____. I am sorry I did not _____. In ten years I want to be _____." Not even my closest friends knew all these things about me. If Egg Donation, offering about a fifth what Michelle and David were offering, wanted all this information, what might Michelle and David want?

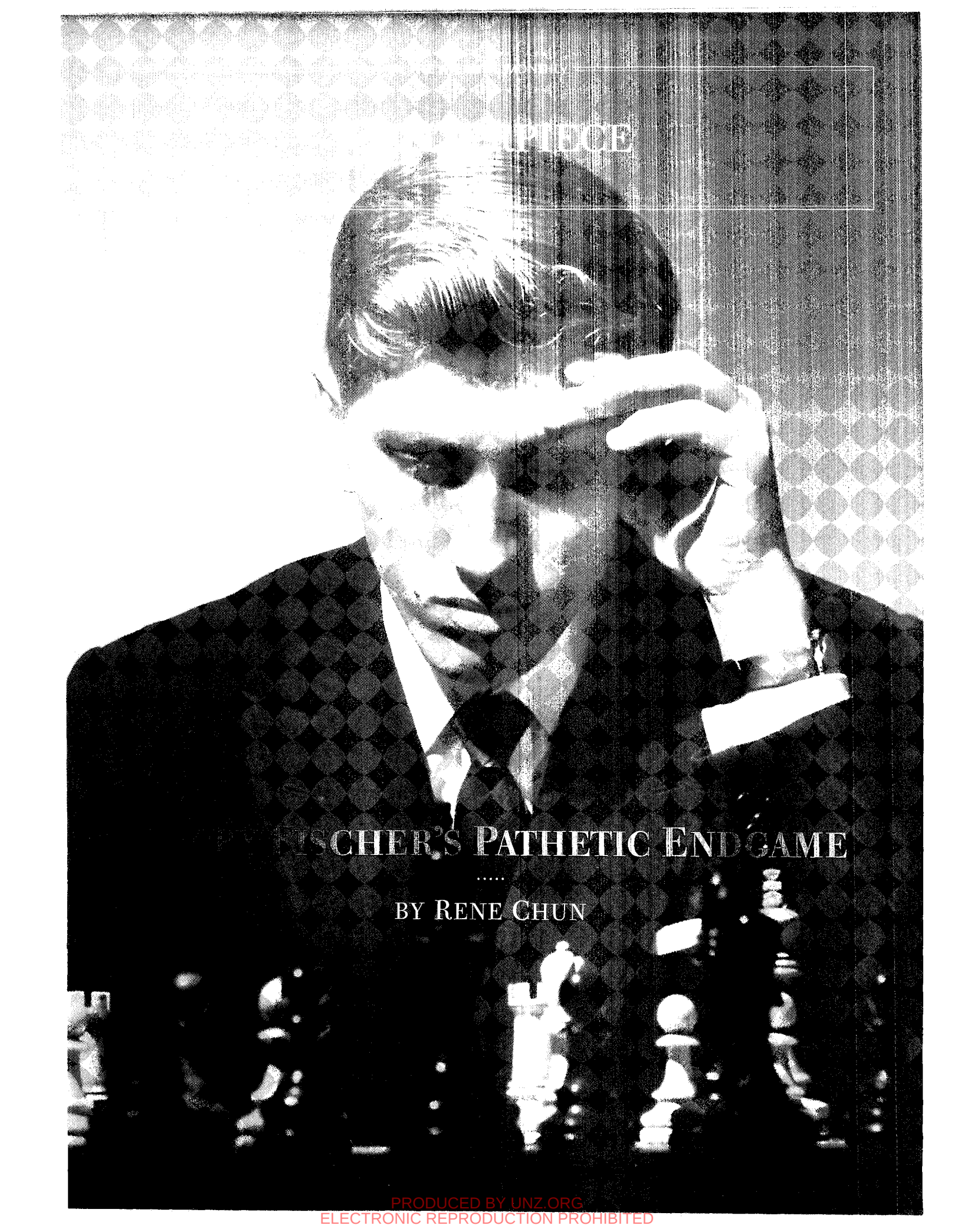
Michelle and David were certainly trying hard. On one classified-ad site I came across a request that was strangely familiar: "Loving family seeks exceptional egg donor with 1500 SAT, great looks, good family health history, Jewish heritage and athletic. Height 5'4"-5'9", Age 18-29. We will pay EXTREMELY well and will take care of all expenses. Hope to hear from you." The e-mail address was David and Michelle's familiar AOL account. Theirs was the most demanding classified on the site, but also the only one that offered to pay "EXTREMELY well."

I kept dreaming about all the things I could do with \$25,000. I had gone into the correspondence on a whim. But soon, despite David's casual tone and the optimistic attitude of all the classifieds and information I read, I realized that this process was something I didn't want to be a part of. I understand the desire for a child who will resemble and fit in with the family. But once a couple starts choosing a few characteristics, shooting for perfection is too easy—especially if they can afford it. The money might have changed my life for a while, but it would have led to the creation of a child encumbered with too many expectations.

After I'd brooded about these matters, I received the shortest e-mail of the correspondence. The verdict on my pictures was in: "I showed the pictures to [my wife] this AM. Personally, I think you look great. She said ho-hum."

David said he might reconsider, and that he was going to keep one of my pictures. That was it. No good-bye, no thanks for my willingness to be, in effect, the biological mother of their child. I guess I didn't fit their design; my genes weren't the right material for their *chef d'oeuvre*. So I was rejected as a donor. I keep imagining the day when David and Michelle's child asks where he or she came from. David will describe how hard they both worked on the whole thing, how many pictures they looked at, and how much money they spent. The child will turn to them and say, "Ho-hum." ▀

Jessica Cohen is a senior studying history at Yale University. This essay, which took first place in the Essays category of The Atlantic's annual student writing competition, appeared in a somewhat different form in an undergraduate publication, The New Journal.



PIECE

FISCHER'S PATHETIC ENDGAME

.....
BY RENE CHUN

BOBBY FISCHER'S PATHETIC ENDGAME

BY RENE CHUN

Paranoia, hubris, and hatred—the unraveling of the greatest chess player ever

Bobby Fischer was singing the blues. As he wailed along with a 1965 recording by Jackie (“Mr. Excitement”) Wilson, his voice—a gravelly baritone ravaged by age but steeled by anger—rumbled through the microphone like a broken-down freight train on rusty wheels: “*You go walking down Broadway, watchin’ people catch the subway! Take it from me, don’t ask for a helping hand, mmm, ’cause no one will understand!*” With each note he became increasingly strident. “*Bright lights will find you, and they will mess you around! Let me tell you, millions will watch you! Have mercy now, as you sink right down to the ground!*” Even if you knew nothing about Bobby Fischer, listening to him sing this song would tell you all you needed to know. “*There just ain’t no pity. No, no, no, in the naked city, yeah—New York City.*”

This unlikely duet, featuring Jackie Wilson and the world’s first and only chess grand master fugitive from justice, was broadcast live, on July 6, 2001, by DZSR Sports Radio, a Manila-based AM station that has embraced Fischer as a ratings booster. In exchange for these rare interviews (Fischer hasn’t given a magazine or TV interview in thirty years), Sports Radio management has happily provided Fischer with hours of free airtime to spin his classic R&B records and to lash out at his enemies, both real and imagined. Fischer categorizes these enemies—including the former New York mayor Ed Koch, both Presidents Bush, and the Times Mirror Corporation—as “Jews, secret Jews, or CIA rats who work for the Jews.”

This radio broadcast was Fischer’s seventeenth in the Philippines. The bizarre karaoke interlude was a departure of sorts, but otherwise the broadcast was no different from the previous sixteen. Fischer’s talking points never vary.

- Bobby Fischer is being persecuted by world Jewry.
- The United States government is a “brutal, evil dictatorship” that has falsely accused Bobby Fischer of a crime and forced him to live in exile.
- Bobby Fischer has been swindled out of a “vast fortune” in royalties by book publishers, movie studios, and clock manufacturers (yes, clock manufacturers), who have brazenly pilfered his brand name, patents, and copyrights.
- The Jews are a “filthy, lying bastard people” bent on world domination through such insidious schemes as the Holocaust (“a money-making invention”), the mass murder of Christian children (“their blood is used for black-magic ceremonies”), and junk food (William Rosenberg, the founder of Dunkin’ Donuts, is singled out as a culprit).

For chess buffs who tune in for some shoptalk from the game’s most revered icon, there is this:

- Chess is nothing more than “mental masturbation.” Not only is the game dead, it’s fixed. Gary Kasparov, the world’s top-rated player, is a “crook” and a former KGB spy who hasn’t played a match in his life in which the outcome wasn’t prearranged.

The No. 1 transgression, however, the thing that has devastated Fischer,

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LOCKHEED MARTIN 

Many Fischer apologists argue that Fischer's outlandish radio broadcasts have been misunderstood. But even the apologists had to throw up their hands when their hero took to the Philippine airwaves on September 11, 2001, and revealed views so loathsome that it was impossible to indulge him any longer.

embittered him, and made him screech at night, alone in his apartment, is the "Bekins heist."

- Millions of dollars' worth of personal memorabilia, painstakingly collected and stockpiled by Bobby Fischer in a ten-by-ten-foot Bekins storage room in Pasadena, California, has been stolen from him in a secret plot involving the Rothschilds (Jews), Bill Clinton (a secret Jew), and unnamed Bekins executives (CIA rats who work for the Jews).

The international chess community, which tracks Fischer's downward spiral the way astronomers track the orbit of a dying comet, has been monitoring his radio interviews since the first one aired, back in January of 1999. For the most part chess people have for years downplayed the importance of his outlandish outbursts, explaining that Fischer's raging anti-Semitism, acute paranoia, and tenuous grasp on reality are hyped by the media and misunderstood by the public. In the early 1990s Fischer's girlfriend at the time said, "He's like a child. Very, very simple." A friend who spent a lot of time with him in the 1990s says, "Aside from his controversial views, as a person Bobby is very kind, very nice, and very human." Another friend, asked how he could stand by someone so blatantly anti-Semitic, replies, "A lot of people wouldn't care if Michael Jordan was an anti-Semite if they could play a game of Horse with him."

Many Fischer apologists argue that Bobby Fischer is in fact deranged, and that as such he deserves not public castigation but psychiatric help. They are quick to point out that he was raised in a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, has had close friends who were Jewish, and in fact had a Jewish mother (information he has gone to great lengths to deny). It seems hard to imagine that his hate-filled rhetoric isn't an unfortunate manifestation of some underlying illness.

But even the Fischer apologists had to throw up their hands when he took to the Philippine airwaves on September 11, 2001. In an interview broadcast this time by Bombo Radyo, a small public-radio station in Baguio City, Fischer revealed views so loathsome that it was impossible to indulge him any longer. Just hours after the most devastating attack on the United States in history, in which thousands had died, Fischer could barely contain his delight. "This is all wonderful news," he announced. "I applaud the act. The U.S. and Israel have been slaughtering the Palestinians, just slaughtering them for years. Robbing them and slaughtering them. Nobody gave a shit. Now it's coming back to the U.S. Fuck the U.S. I want to see the U.S. wiped out."

Fischer added that the events of September 11 provided the ideal opportunity to stage a long-overdue coup d'état. He envisioned, he said, a "*Seven Days in May* scenario," with the country taken over by the military; he also hoped to see all its synagogues closed, and hundreds of thousands of Jews executed. "Ultimately the white man should leave the United States and the black people should go back to Africa," he said. "The white people should go back to Europe, and the country should be returned to the American Indians. This is the future I would like to see for the so-called United States." Before signing off Fischer cried out, "Death to the U.S.!"

The United States Chess Federation had always been willing to ignore Fischer's public antics, no matter how embarrassing. He was, after all, Bobby Fischer—the greatest player in the history of the game. But this was too much. On October 28 of last year the USCF unanimously passed a motion denouncing Fischer's incendiary broadcast. "Bobby has driven some more nails in his coffin," Frank Camaratta Jr., a USCF board member, says. The backlash has reached all the way to grassroots chess clubs. "It's because of Fischer that I'm involved in chess," says Larry Tamarkin, a manager at the Marshall Chess Club, a legendary New York parlor frequented by Fischer in his teens. "But I can't help feeling a

sense of betrayal, anger, and sadness. You devote your entire life to one player and find out he's completely off his rocker. It ruins everything. He's an embarrassment." Asked about the possibility of a Fischer comeback, Tamarkin can't conceal his disgust. "We prefer that he doesn't come back. Because if he does, it will destroy the last vestige of magic."

In reality the magic has been gone for some thirty years. That's how long it has been since Fischer played his first and only world-championship match. Why he stopped playing tournaments, and how his life unraveled so pathetically, is a story one can learn only by seeking out those who actually know Fischer. There are surprisingly few such people—and fewer yet are willing to talk. Fischer doesn't tolerate friends who give interviews. His address book is a graveyard of crossed-out names of people who have been quoted in articles about him.

But some formerly loyal Fischer associates, appalled at his recent behavior, are finally talking about him. They reveal that Fischer's story doesn't follow the usual celebrity-gone-to-seed arc. He has not been brought low by drugs or alcohol, by sex scandals or profligate spending. Instead he is a victim of his own mind—and of the inordinate attention that the world has given it. Fischer's paranoia, rage, and hubris have been enough to transform him into an enemy of the state; they have been enough to sabotage a brilliant career and turn a confident, charismatic figure into a dithering recluse; and, sadly, they have been enough to make us forget that when Bobby Fischer played chess, it was absolutely riveting theater, even for those who didn't play the game.

In many ways Fischer's story resembles that of the mentally unstable Nobel Prize winner John Forbes Nash Jr., the mathematician who inspired the book and Oscar-winning movie *A Beautiful Mind*, but without the happy ending. Both Fischer and Nash were the best at their chosen professions. Both were widely considered to be geniuses. Both were also supremely arrogant, rebellious, eccentric, and—although respected—not necessarily well liked by colleagues. Fischer left the United States to live in exile. So did Nash. Even eerier, while in the grip of schizophrenia Nash was an anti-Semite and was convinced that Communists (the men at MIT wearing red ties) were observing him.

Contrary to popular belief, Fischer didn't emerge from the womb a full-blown grand master. While he was learning the game, as a child in Brooklyn, he was essentially a hotshot club player—a prodigy, to be sure, but not obviously world-championship material. But at age thirteen, in 1956, Fischer made a colossal leap. That year he became the youngest player ever to win the U.S. Junior Championship. He also dominated the U.S. tournament circuit. What was astounding wasn't simply that a gawky thirteen-year-old kid in blue jeans was suddenly winning chess tournaments. It was the way he was winning. He didn't just beat people—he humiliated them. The thing he relished most was watching his opponents squirm. "I like the moment when I break a man's ego," he once said, during a Dick Cavett interview.

Later in the year he played a game so remarkable that it was immediately dubbed "the Game of the Century." Fischer faced Donald Byrne, then one of the top ten U.S. players, at the Rosenwald Memorial Tournament, in New York. The now legendary battle was packed with more chess pyrotechnics than are typically seen during the course of an entire match. There were complex combinations, ingenious sacrifices, danger and apparent danger—enough to make Fischer, who won, a chess god overnight. Asked to explain his sudden emergence on the world stage of chess, Fischer shrugged and said, "I just got good."



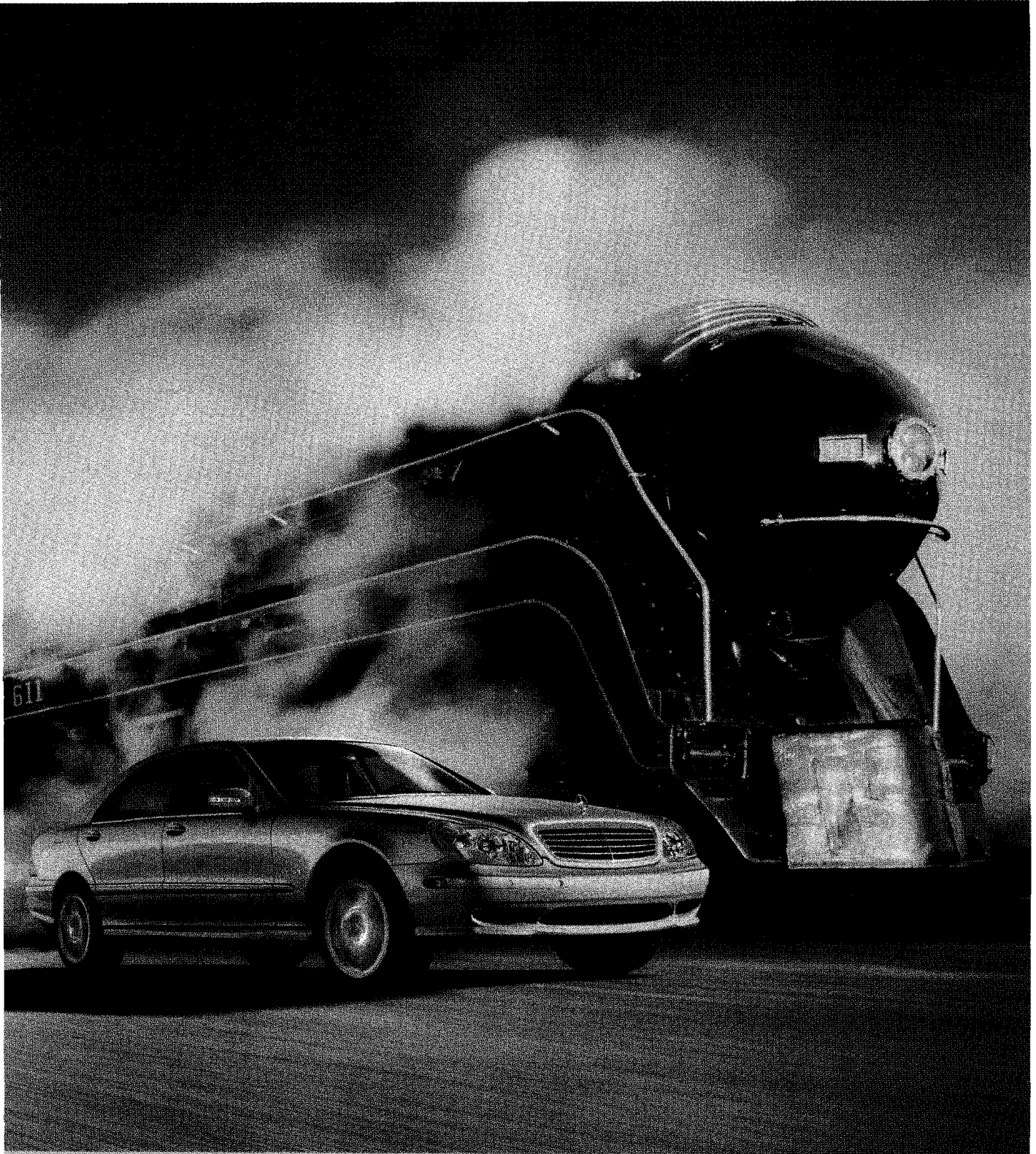
Bobby Fischer in Belgrade in 1992, announcing his \$5 million rematch with Boris Spassky

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The thirteen-year-old Fischer shows off his skills by playing twenty-one opponents simultaneously, in Jersey City, New Jersey

The Fischer-Byrne duel was dissected in newspapers and magazines around the world and won Fischer the Brilliancy Prize, an annual chess award that recognizes particularly imaginative play. Chess analysts, a decidedly reserved lot not given to spasms of hyperbole, peppered their dry annotations with exclamation marks ("Be6!"). "While we have learned to distrust superlatives, this is one game that deserves all the praise lavished on it," wrote Fred Reinfeld, a leading chess journalist of the day. Even the Russians, loath to acknowledge so much as the existence of American players, grudgingly tipped their hats. After the Fischer-Byrne game, Mikhail Botvinnik, the reigning world champion, reportedly said, "We will have to start keeping an eye on this boy."

That is exactly what the chess world did from that moment forward. Fischer's achievements were staggering: In his time he was the youngest U.S. master (at fourteen years and five months), the youngest international grand master, and the youngest candidate for the world championship (at fifteen years and six months). He also won eight U.S. chess championship titles—a record not likely to be broken. In 1966 he co-authored *Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess*, the best-selling chess book ever, and in 1969 he published *My 60 Memorable Games*, arguably the best chess book ever.

Fischer also just won a lot of games—an impressive fact given that draws among grand masters are commonplace. At the highest level of competitive chess, players are so familiar with one another's games that they can practically read their opponents' minds. The memorization of opening theory and the intensive study of an opponent's oeuvre so dominate the modern game that when two grand masters square off, the first twenty moves unfold like a stale sitcom plot. Players often lament that "draw death" is killing the game.

But Fischer didn't play for draws. He was always on the attack—even rhetorically. Of the Soviet champions who had dominated the game so completely, he said, "They have nothing on me, those guys. They can't even touch me."

The Soviets were not amused. They dismissed the young American upstart as *nyekulturni*—literally, "uncultured." This wasn't far from the truth, and Fischer knew it. He lacked education, and had always been insecure about this. His deficiency was particularly glaring now that most of his interaction was with adults, many of whom were sophisticated and well-read.

The answer, Fischer thought, was to upgrade his wardrobe. So at sixteen, using his chess winnings, he traded in his uniform of sneakers, flannel shirt, and jeans for luxurious bespoke suits. He reveled in his new Beau Brummell image. When he traveled abroad for tournaments, he frequently visited local tailors and had suits cut for his gangly, broad-shouldered physique. He liked to brag that he owned seventeen such suits, which he rotated to ensure even wear. "I hate ready-made suits, button-down collars, and sports shirts," he once said. "I don't want to look like a bum. I get up in the morning, I put on a suit."

The change did wonders for Fischer's self-esteem. He boasted that once he had defeated the Russians and become the world champion, he'd take on all challengers. Like the boxing champ Joe Louis, he'd have his own bum-of-the-month club. He boldly promised that he was "gonna put chess on the map." He envisioned a rock-star existence for himself: a \$50,000 custom-made Rolls-Royce, a yacht, a private jet, and a mansion—in either Beverly Hills or Hong Kong—"built exactly like a rook." Asked what his long-term goals were, he replied, "All I want to do, ever, is play chess."

But the sartorial façade of sophistication was a flimsy one. Those close to Fischer knew that when it came to art, politics, or anything else the cosmopolitan set talked about, he was at a total loss. "If you were out to dinner with Bobby in the sixties, he wouldn't be able to follow the conversation," says Don Schultz, a former friend. "He would have his little pocket set out and he'd play chess at the table. He had a one-dimensional outlook on life."

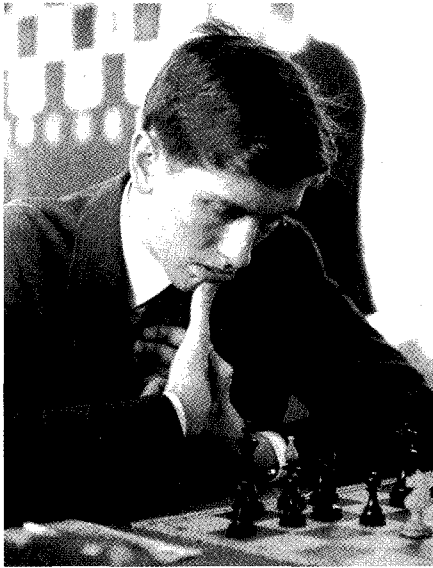
This limited world view prompted Fischer to drop out of Brooklyn's Erasmus Hall High School midway through his junior year. It was hardly a case of a promising academic life being cut short. Pulling courtesy *Ds*, ostracized by the other students, Fischer was going nowhere. Many chess insiders have insisted that the poor grades were a direct result of an abnormally high IQ—that is, Bobby wasn't stupid, he was just bored. (Although Fischer was a poor student, he was regularly reading Russian chess journals.) It's a point that has long been debated. Everybody agrees that Fischer is no dummy, including Fischer himself (during one interview he said, "I object to being called a chess genius, because I consider myself to be an all-around genius who just happens to play chess"), but chess champions aren't necessarily geniuses. What they need for success is powerful memories, the ability to concentrate deeply, refined recognition and problem-solving skills, decisiveness, stamina, and a killer instinct.

When he dropped out of high school, Fischer was living in Brooklyn with his older sister, Joan, and his mother, Regina. Regina was a registered nurse, a secular Jew, and a single mother with a bohemian lifestyle that included leftist politics and social activism but not chess. (When Fischer was born, his mother was married to Hans-Gerhardt Fischer, a German biophysicist, who is generally assumed to be Bobby's father, although Bobby's paternity is the subject of some speculation.) Fischer's relationship with his mother was strained, in part because of her politics, her religious heritage, and her general eccentricity. "Bobby's mother was a cuckoo," the *New York Times* chess columnist Robert Byrne says. "She was an intelligent neurotic full of far-fetched ideas." As Fischer developed as a chess player, he distanced himself from his mother. In 1962, three years after dropping

Fischer's achievements were staggering: in his time he was the youngest U.S. master (fourteen), the youngest international grand master, and the youngest candidate for the world championship (fifteen). Asked to explain his sudden emergence on the world stage of chess, Fischer shrugged and said, "I just got good."

out of high school, he began living alone in the family apartment (his mother and Joan had moved out).

Fischer began to devote fourteen hours a day to studying chess. According to a 1962 interview in *Harper's*, he had some 200 chess books and countless foreign chess journals stacked on his floor. He had an exquisite inlaid chess table, made to order in Switzerland, and three additional boards, one beside each bed in his apartment. As part of a Spartan training regime he would play matches against himself that lasted for days, sleeping in the three beds in rotation. Asked how he spent his free time, Fischer once replied, "I'll see a movie or something. There's really nothing for me to do. Maybe I'll study some chess books."



Fischer in Warsaw, Poland, in 1962

As Fischer became more successful, he began to generate more and more criticism. In a very short time he managed to offend and estrange almost everyone who was in a position to advance his career, including USCF officials, patrons, journalists, and sponsors. He frequently backed out of tournaments. He'd threaten a no-show unless the promoters ponied up more prize money. He also regularly grouched about noise and light levels.

The press loved it. Fischer was labeled an insufferable diva and a psych-out artist who made life hell for tournament officials and tried to rattle opponents by complaining about, among other things, high-frequency sounds that only he and several species of non-human mammals could detect. The press also loved to talk about his greed. But Fischer never cared about money per se. "Bobby wanted to get all kinds of money for everything," says Arnold Denker, a former U.S. chess champion, "and yet when he got it, he pissed it away. In Reykjavík [the site of the 1972 world-championship match between Fischer and Boris Spassky] the maids who cleaned up his room made thousands of dollars because he left money under the pillows and all over. He wanted money because to him it meant that people thought he was important."

Fischer demanded richer purses not only to validate his self-worth but because he was convinced that tournament promoters were out to fleece him. He would sign a tournament contract only to obsess later about how quickly his demands had been met. Although the prize money involved was always more than fair, Fischer's paranoia invariably got the best of him. "Away from the board, Bobby suffered from a terrible inferiority complex," says Allan Kaufman, the former director of the American Chess Foundation. "In his mind he concocted lots of excuses: people were taking advantage of him; they were smarter than he was; if he had only had their education, he would know what to ask for in negotiations." Often before the ink on a contract was dry, Fischer would refuse to play unless the purse was raised. Promoters would cave, only to receive word later that Fischer was demanding even more money. Frequently the negotiations became so impossible that frustrated promoters simply walked. These confrontations prolonged his quest for the world title. "A couple of times Bobby dropped out of tournaments that would have led to him playing for the world championship earlier," says Shelby Lyman, a chess pundit who analyzed Fischer's famous 1972 match with Boris Spassky on PBS.

The Russians certainly weren't willing to lend support to Fischer's title bid—especially after *Sports Illustrated* in 1962 published an interview with Fischer in which he accused the Soviet chess establishment of cheating in an effort to deny him what he viewed as his birthright: the world chess championship. In the interview, titled "The Russians Have Fixed World Chess," Fischer alleged that Soviet grand masters were forced to lose or draw games in order to advance the careers of favored players who were being groomed as potential world champs. Fischer argued that he was at a great disadvantage, because during a tournament he had to endure a grueling schedule of games while several

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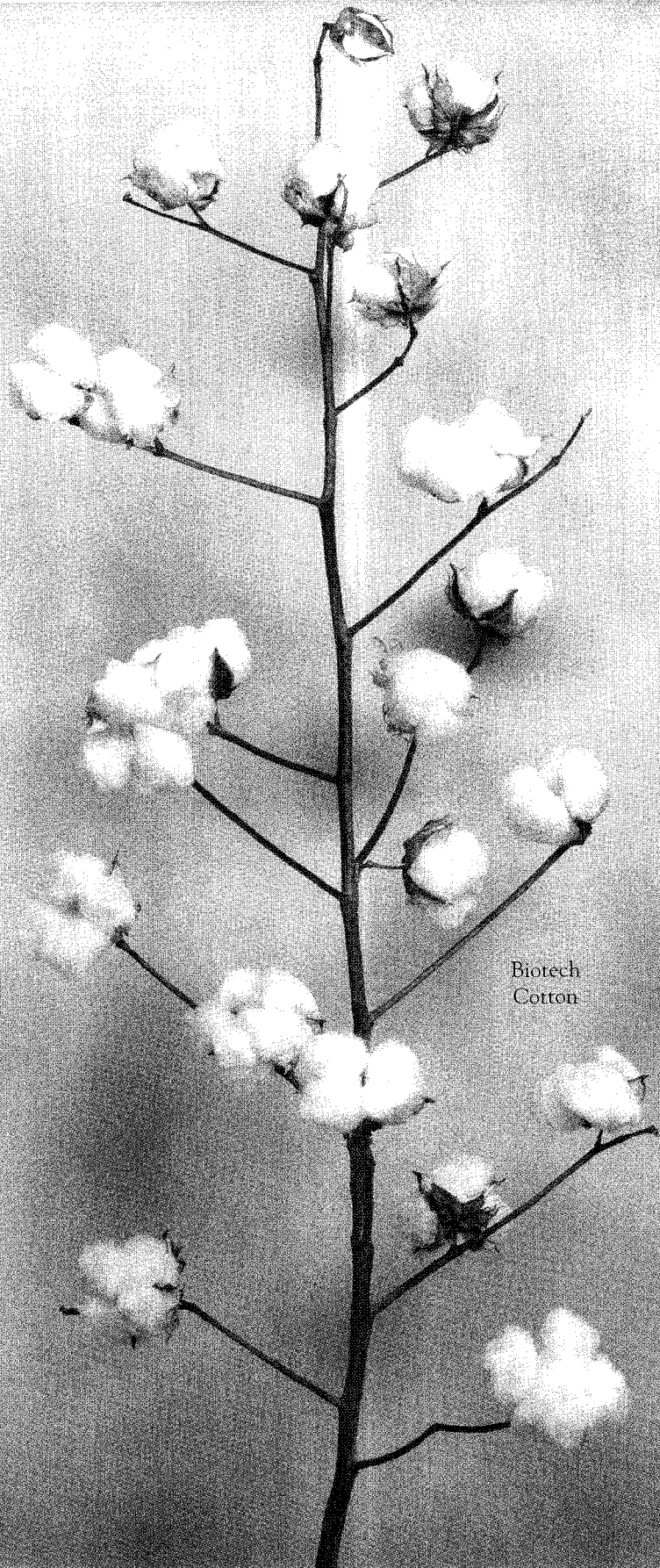
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After Fischer moved to California, in 1968, he began studying *Mein Kampf* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It was rumored that he slept with a picture of Hitler hanging over his bed. When asked why he admired the Führer, Fischer said, "Because he imposed his will on the world."

anointed Soviet grand masters cruised from one victory to the next, conserving their strength for the real competition—which more often than not was Fischer himself in the finals.

Published after Fischer had finished a disappointing fourth in the 1962 Curaçao Candidates tournament, the interview was denounced by the Soviets as a classic case of sour grapes. Those familiar with the palace intrigue of the Soviet Chess Federation, however, knew better. Nikolai Krogus, a Soviet grand master now living in Staten Island, acknowledges that Fischer's allegations of foul play were valid. "There were some agreed draws at Curaçao," he admits. According to Arnold Denker, beating the Soviet chess machine during that era was all but impossible. "In 1946," he says, "I had an adjourned game with Mikhail Botvinnik in which I was ahead. During the break I saw Botvinnik eating dinner and relaxing. I didn't have dinner. I went to my room and studied. When the game resumed, Botvinnik remarkably found the only move to draw the game. I said, 'How is that possible?' Someone told me, 'Listen, young man, all of these people were analyzing for him while he was having his dinner.' I was naive in those days."

"I'll never play in one of those rigged tournaments again," Fischer fumed after losing to the Soviet Armenian champion Tigran Petrosian at Curaçao. "[The Soviets] clobber us easy in team play. But man to man, I'd take Petrosian on any time." The five-time U.S. chess champion Larry Evans agrees that the Soviets were less than good sportsmen when it came to defending their world title. But he also believes that Fischer was looking for a convenient excuse for losing. "The fact of the matter is," Evans says, "that in '62 at Curaçao, Bobby just wasn't good enough yet."

After Curaçao, Fischer dropped out of international competition for several years. His cash flow, which was about \$5,000 a year, slowed to a trickle. Money was so scarce that he began living at a YMCA. When he couldn't afford that, he moved in with friends, hopping from apartment to apartment and running up phone bills he couldn't pay. Broke and feeling increasingly detached from New York's insular chess community, he moved to California in the spring of 1968. He was twenty-five years old.

Fischer's move to the West Coast has sometimes been considered the beginning of his so-called "wilderness years." Although he wasn't playing in many tournaments, his work ethic never wavered: he continued studying chess during most of his waking hours. But late at night, Arnold Denker recalls, Fischer began prowling parking lots, slipping white-supremacist pamphlets under windshield wipers. He began studying anti-Semitic classics such as *Mein Kampf* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. He became obsessed with German history and the Third Reich, and collected Nazi memorabilia. It was rumored that he slept with a picture of Adolf Hitler hanging over his bed. Larry Evans says that Fischer's admiration for the Führer had less to do with anti-Semitism than with insatiable ego. "We once went to see a documentary on Hitler," Evans recalls. "When we came out of the theater, Bobby said that he admired Hitler. I asked him why, and he said, 'Because he imposed his will on the world.'" (Fischer has never made an effort to conceal his distaste for Jews. As early as 1962, in the *Harper's* interview, he expressed his prejudice, mentioning what he perceived to be a growing problem affecting the upper ranks of his profession. "Yeah, there are too many Jews in chess," he said. "They seem to have taken away the class of the game. They don't seem to dress so nicely. That's what I don't like.")

In the fall of 1968 Fischer walked out of the Chess Olympiad in Switzerland. He refused to play for another eighteen months, and some feared that his competitive drive had stalled, but that wasn't the case. He was still training four-

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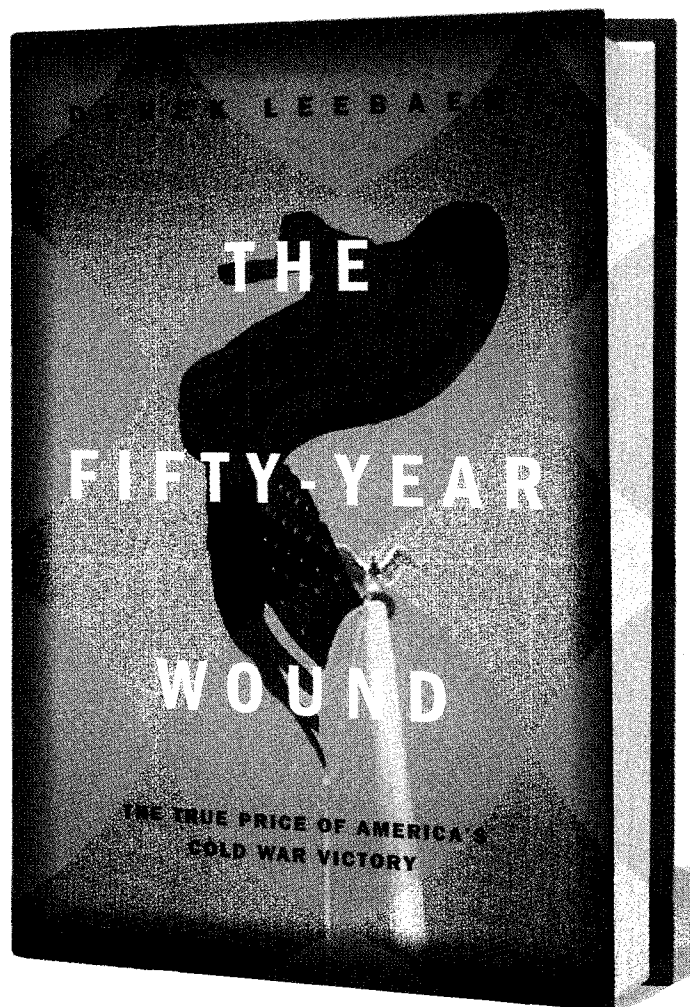
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“That’s a difficult position,” a companion of Fischer’s said during the 1972 world-championship match, against Boris Spassky. “Let’s go back to the hotel and analyze it.” Fischer said, “What do you mean, analyze? That guy’s a fish. Let’s go bowling.”

teen hours a day and playing chess privately. And in 1970 and 1971 he returned to public competition and had the longest winning streak in tournament chess, when he won twenty consecutive outright victories against the world’s top grand masters, a record unrivaled in the modern era.

By 1972 Fischer had reached his peak. That year the reigning world champion, Boris Spassky, agreed to meet him in Reykjavik to play what would be the most carefully scrutinized match ever, a contest the press heralded as “the chess match of the century.”

Inescapably, the match became a Cold War battleground. The world’s two superpowers were about to lock horns across a chess board. The political stakes were high enough that President Richard Nixon ordered Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to intercede personally when Fischer began hinting that he might not play. “In short,” Kissinger reportedly said at the time, “I told Fischer to get his butt over to Iceland.” According to the *Boston Globe* chess columnist Harold Dondis, however, “Kissinger tried to call Bobby, but Bobby wouldn’t take the call.”

Although Fischer had worked his entire life for an opportunity to play for the world chess crown, now that he finally had the chance, he began to be taken over by anxiety, self-doubt, and paranoia (he feared the Soviets would shoot down his plane). All the youthful bravado and swagger—the bum-of-the-month club, the taunting of the Russians—was a memory. “They had to drag Bobby kicking and screaming to play in Iceland,” Shelby Lyman says.

The prize money troubled Fischer too. Up to this point the world-championship chess purse had not been particularly noteworthy. When Spassky won the world title, in 1969, his take was a paltry \$1,400. The promoters in Iceland were willing to pump the prize money up some, but not to a level Fischer deemed sufficient. When a handsome five-figure purse was suggested, Fischer balked and threatened a no-show. When Spassky and his entourage were in Reykjavik for the opening festivities, Fischer was still in New York, grumbling about indentured servitude.

After a series of escalating demands, Fischer managed to drive up the match’s prize money to \$250,000 and was guaranteed a considerable slice of film or TV revenues. But even then the match hit a snag. Fischer refused to play because his favorite television program, *The Jack LaLanne Show*, wasn’t available on Icelandic TV. It was Lina Grumette, a Los Angeles chess promoter and Fischer’s “chess mother” at the time, who finally managed to talk Fischer into playing.

Fischer’s performance in Iceland was no disappointment. He put on a show that was equal parts Ionesco play, soap opera, and political potboiler. Between acts he managed to play some brilliant chess. The games were an instant hit. “World Chess Championship,” the Shelby Lyman program created by PBS to cover the tournament, was at the time the highest-rated PBS show ever—an amazing fact, considering that it consisted of little more than a giant wall-mounted chess board on which each move was recorded and then discussed by several analysts.

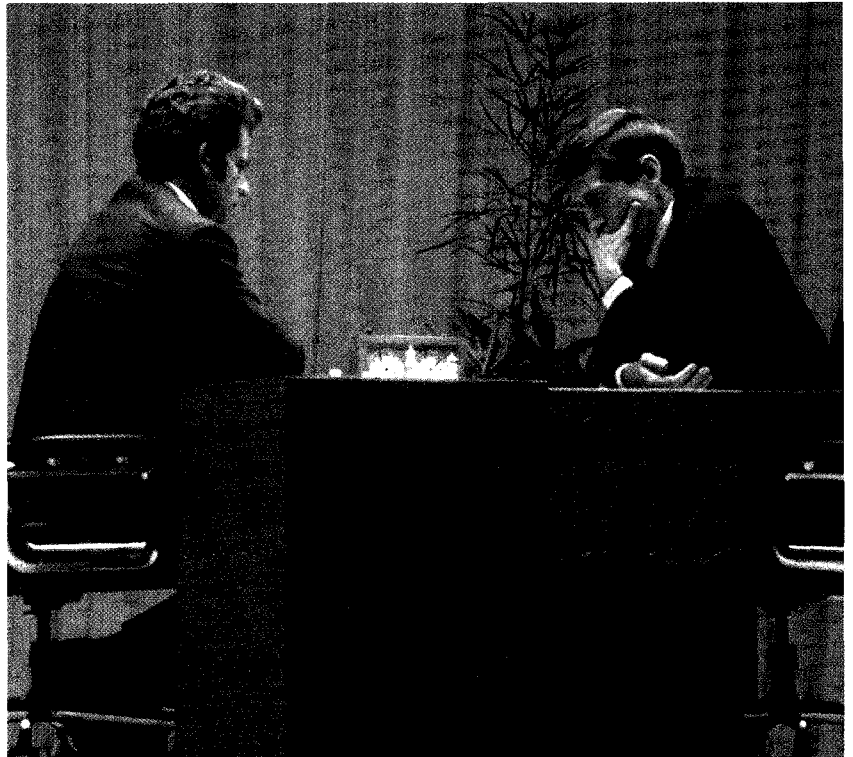
Fischer played poorly in the beginning, and Spassky easily won the first game, on July 12. Fischer refused to play the second game unless all cameras were removed from the hall. The match organizers tried to minimize the intrusiveness of the cameras, but still he refused to play. Finally Fischer was warned that if his demands didn’t stop, game two would be awarded to Spassky. Fischer thought, wrongly, that they were bluffing, and ended up forfeiting the game. Suddenly he was in a hole, with Spassky ahead 2 to 0. At this juncture Spassky could easily have retreated to Moscow still in possession of his crown, and nobody would have blamed him because of Fischer’s behavior.

To placate Fischer the third game was played in another room and broadcast to the dismayed audience on closed-circuit television. He won handily. The players returned to the exhibition hall for the rest of the match, and Fischer

soon grabbed the lead and held it, albeit still complaining about the presence of cameras (in the end very little of the match was filmed), the surface of the chess board (too shiny), the proximity of the audience (he insisted that the first seven rows of seats be removed), and the ambient noise. Distressed at their countryman's poor showing, members of the Soviet delegation began to make their own unreasonable demands, hoping to unnerve Fischer. They accused him of using a concealed device to interfere with Spassky's brain waves. The match was halted while police officers searched the playing hall. Fischer's chair was taken apart, light fixtures were dismantled, the entire auditorium was swept for suspicious electronic signals. Nothing was found. (In a subsequent investigation a Soviet chemist waved a plastic bag around the stage and then sealed it for lab analysis. The label affixed to the bag read "Air from stage.")

Fischer wasn't flustered. If anything, his play became stronger. As the week wore on, Spassky began slowly to crack, and on September 1 he resigned.

Fischer's accomplishment cannot be overstated. A brash twenty-nine-year-old high school dropout, armed with little more than a pocket chess set and a dog-eared book documenting Spassky's important games, had single-handedly defeated the Soviet chess juggernaut. Spassky had a wealth of resources at his disposal to help him plot moves, including thirty-five grand masters back in the Soviet Union. Fischer, on the other hand, had two administrative seconds who served essentially as companions, and Bill Lombardy, a grand master, whose role was to help analyze games. However, Fischer did almost all the analysis himself—when he bothered to do anything. "After the games were adjourned, all the Soviets would go back to Spassky's hotel room to plan for the next position," recalls Don Schultz, one of the seconds. "Lombardy said to Fischer, 'That's a difficult position. Let's go back to the hotel and analyze it.' Fischer said, 'What do you mean, analyze? That guy's a fish. Let's go bowling.'"



Fischer and Spassky during the final game of their world-championship match, in Reykjavík in 1972

Fischer returned home to a hero's welcome. In a televised ceremony at New York's City Hall, Mayor John Lindsay presented him with the key to the city. Shelby Lyman recalls, "Here's Bobby in his great moment of triumph. He's resplendent in this beautiful suit. The world is his: he's young, handsome, women adore him, there's all this money if he wants it. And he later said to a reporter, 'The creeps are beginning to gather.' He was referring to press, lawyers, agents—everyone he thought was out to take advantage of him. After that his whole life was about avoiding the creeps."

Fischer didn't in fact get the full hero treatment. "I was never invited to the White House," he said in one of his radio interviews. "They invited that Olympic Russian gymnast—that little Communist, Olga Korbut." In his notorious September 11 interview he elaborated. "Look what I have done for the U.S.," he said. "Nobody has single-handedly done more for the U.S. than me. When I won the world championship, in 1972, the United States had an image of, you know, a football country, a baseball country, but nobody thought of it as an intellectual country. I turned all that around single-handedly, right? But I was useful then because there was the Cold War, right? But now I'm not useful

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anymore. You see, the Cold War is over and now they want to wipe me out, steal everything I have, and put me in prison.”

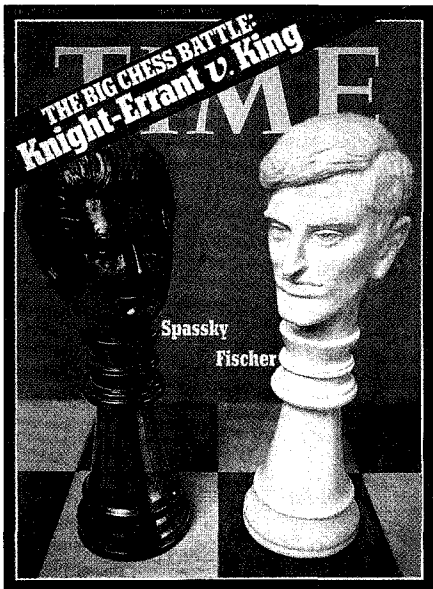
Following the City Hall ceremony Fischer returned to Pasadena, leaving \$5 million worth of unsigned endorsement contracts on his lawyer’s desk. It wasn’t that he didn’t want the extra income; he just couldn’t deal with the creeps.

He also stopped playing tournament chess. And in 1975 the World Chess Federation (known by its French acronym, FIDE) stripped him of his world-championship title for failure to defend his crown against the Russian grand master Anatoly Karpov. Such stonewalling was difficult for chess people to fathom, given that Fischer was so much stronger than the competition. The truth was that Bobby Fischer was running scared. “Bobby was always afraid of losing,” Arnold Denker says. “I don’t know why, but he was. The fear was in him. He said that if he played Karpov, he was going to insist on a long match. After not playing for three years, he was very concerned about how good he would be.” Shelby Lyman echoes that assessment. “Hating to lose, and having the myth destroyed,” he says, “was a big part of him not playing.”

Instead of playing tournaments, Fischer retreated to the protective cocoon of the Worldwide Church of God, an apocalyptic cult that predicted the end of the world every four to seven years and whose members tithed up to 30 percent of their income. Such protection came at a steep price. It was reported that out of his \$200,000 income that year he donated \$61,200 to the WCG. “They cleaned out my pockets,” he later said. “Now my only income is a few royalty checks from my books. I was really very foolish.” To show its appreciation for such a generous contribution, the WCG treated Fischer almost as if he were the very deity the Church’s members had been waiting for. He lived in WCG-owned apartments, was entertained at fancy restaurants, and flew to exotic spots in the Church’s private jet. And Fischer was set up on the first dates of his life, with attractive WCG members. A fellow WCG member, Harry Sneider, says that this hedonistic lifestyle had a detrimental effect on Fischer: “He got pampered and got a lot of attention. It made him soft.”

Fischer’s relationship with the WCG, like all the others in his life, didn’t last. In 1977, after a bitter falling-out that led Fischer to claim that the WCG was taking its orders from a “satanical secret world government,” he cut all ties with the Church. Then he crawled even further into his own netherworld. He began dressing like a hobo. He took up residence in seedy hotels. He began worrying about the purity of his bodily fluids. He bought great quantities of exotic herbal potions, which he carried in a suitcase, to stave off the toxins he feared might be secretly put in his food and water by Soviet agents. According to a 1985 article in *Sports Illustrated*, Fischer medicated himself with such esoteric remedies as Mexican rattlesnake pills (“good for general health”) and Chinese healthy-brain pills (“good for headaches”). His suitcase also contained a large orange-juice squeezer and lots and lots of vitamins. He always kept the suitcase locked, even when he was staying with friends. “If the Commies come to poison me, I don’t want to make it easy for them,” he explained to a friend. Perhaps the most telling sign of his rapid mental deterioration was that he insisted on having all his dental fillings removed. “If somebody took a filling out and put in an electronic device, he could influence your thinking,” Fischer confided to a friend. “I don’t want anything artificial in my head.”

The low point of Fischer’s California sojourn came on May 26, 1981, when two Pasadena police officers stopped him for an ID check. By then he had unkempt hair, a scraggly beard, and tattered clothes, and looked like an aging hippie down on his luck. He also generally fit the description of a man who had recently committed two bank robberies in the neighborhood. He refused to answer questions and was taken to jail, where he spent forty-eight hours. “All



Spassky and Fischer on the cover of Time, July 31, 1972

he had to do was tell the police he was Bobby Fischer, the chess player, and the whole thing would have been over," a friend says. "But he just couldn't bring himself to do it. Submitting to authority is a foreign concept to Bobby." A year later Fischer privately published a fourteen-page pamphlet titled "I Was Tortured in the Pasadena Jailhouse!" The pamphlet, which became a surprise best seller in chess shops across the country, is a melodramatic account of Fischer's confinement. The subheadings say it all: "Brutally Handcuffed." "Choked." "Isolation & Torture." "Sick Cop."

Meanwhile, he was turning down big money to come out of retirement. Caesars Palace in Las Vegas offered him \$250,000 for a single exhibition game. After Fischer had agreed to the terms and a date had been set, he reneged. "I'm risking my title," he griped. "I should get a million dollars." According to a 1992 article in *Esquire*, despots and rogue millionaires were also willing to pay outrageous purses to Fischer: Ferdinand Marcos offered him \$3 million to play a tournament in the Philippines; the Shah of Iran offered \$2 million; Qatar, South Africa, Chile, and Argentina are believed to have put similar deals on the table. When a Francoist millionaire from Spain offered \$4 million, Fischer replied, "Nah. The figure's too low."

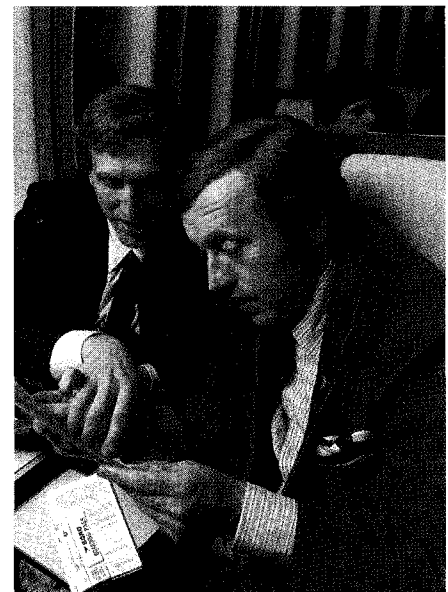
What Fischer craved far more than wealth was anonymity. To achieve it he assumed a new identity and began carrying a Nevada driver's license and a Social Security card bearing the pseudonym Robert D. James. This is the name that appears on the 1981 Pasadena police report. (His full name is Robert James Fischer.)

To generate income, however, he resorted to selling himself to chess fans and curiosity seekers. The going rate for an hour's phone conversation was \$2,500. Bob Dylan is said to have received a call from Fischer as a gift from his manager. For \$5,000 a personal meeting could be arranged. A student of the three-time U.S. chess champion Lev Alburt once paid \$10,000 for several "chess consultations." Alburt says his student considered the money well spent.

In the years to come insiders knew that Fischer was still the man to beat. In 1981 the grand master Peter Biyiasas played seventeen straight games of speed chess against Fischer and lost every one. "He was too good," Biyiasas said at the time. "There was no use in playing him. It wasn't like I made this mistake or that mistake. It was like I was being gradually outplayed from the start. He wasn't taking any time to think. The most depressing thing about it is that I wasn't even getting out of the middle game to an endgame. I don't ever remember an endgame."

In 1992 Fischer came out of retirement to play Boris Spassky in a \$5 million rematch that commemorated the twenty-year anniversary of their meeting in Reykjavik. Aficionados dismissed the match as meaningless, since Fischer was no longer the world champion, and Spassky was then ranked ninety-ninth in the world. But the press had reason to celebrate: Fischer was a big draw; there was the nostalgic superpower angle; and the setting was Yugoslavia. United Nations sanctions had been imposed in an effort to halt the fighting in the country, and Americans were forbidden to do any business there, even in the form of a chess match. Fischer spoke arrogantly to the press about the irrelevance of the sanctions, and practically dared the United States to keep him from playing. Annoyed, Washington decided to make an example of him; the Department of the Treasury issued a cease-and-desist letter to Fischer, stating that if he played chess in Yugoslavia, he would be in violation of Executive Order 12810. The penalty for defying the order was a \$250,000 fine, ten years in prison, or both. Fischer appeared untroubled.

He had signed on for the match because he desperately needed money. This was to be his big payday. After all the missed endorsements and spurned



Fischer traveling by plane with the TV personality David Frost, 1972

In 1992 Fischer came out of retirement to play Spassky in Yugoslavia, where UN sanctions were in place. The Department of the Treasury issued a cease-and-desist letter to Fischer. He was immediately indicted after the match, and hasn't returned to the United States since.

multimillion-dollar matches, he was prepared to play one last time, to ensure his financial security: the winner's share would be \$3.65 million.

In the end, though, Fischer didn't play for money. He played for love. Not for love of the game but for the love of Zita Rajcsanyi, an eighteen-year-old Hungarian chess prodigy who had leveraged a pen-pal relationship with Fischer into a full-fledged romance. With glasses, a long ponytail, and Converse high-tops, Rajcsanyi was hardly a goddess. But she was exactly what was needed to coax Fischer out of his shell. "Zita wrote Bobby beautiful letters telling him how wonderful it was for her to be inspired by his great genius," Harry Sneider, the WCC member, says. "She had a lot to do with him coming back. Actually, it was she who inspired him."

That Rajcsanyi was able to talk Fischer out of his apartment, much less onto a plane bound for Yugoslavia, is miraculous. By this time his paranoia had intensified. Several months before the match Darnay Hoffman, who produced a 1972 TV exposé about Fischer and was working on another TV project about him, had tracked Fischer to Orange Street—in the heart, curiously, of the Fairfax district, then L.A.'s largest Jewish neighborhood. When a film-crew member knocked on the door to request an interview, he heard Fischer inside frantically dialing a rotary phone and screaming into the receiver, "They've found me!"

Once Fischer arrived in Yugoslavia, however, he showed not the slightest indication of mental trouble. He wore a suit and appeared healthy, robust, almost happy. "Bobby is so kind, so friendly," Spassky marveled at the time. "He is normal!" Lev Alburt ventures an explanation. "Chess is a game that forces you to be objective and to take into account an opponent's views," he says. "It forces you to make reasonable judgments and to be sane. When Bobby quit playing, it was really the end of his rational existence. And he began filling that void with crazy ideas."

This was made painfully evident when Fischer kicked off the pre-match festivities in Yugoslavia with a press conference on September 1. After the usual battery of chess-related questions a journalist finally asked the question that was on everybody's mind: "Are you worried by U.S. government threats over your defiance of sanctions?" Fischer calmly reached into a briefcase, pulled out the Treasury Department letter, held it up, and said, "Here is my reply to their order not to defend my title here." He then spat on the paper.

Fischer proceeded to rattle off a series of astonishing proclamations: he hadn't paid his taxes since 1976 (and wasn't about to start now); he was going to write a book that would prove that Russian grand masters ("some of the lowest dogs around") had "destroyed chess" through "immoral, unethical, prearranged games"; he really wasn't an anti-Semite, because he was pro-Arab, and Arabs are Semites too. His assertion that Soviet communism was "basically a mask for Bolshevism, which is a mask for Judaism" elicited the most quizzical expressions.

The old Bobby Fischer was back, and more bizarre than ever. This was made eminently clear when Fischer informed tournament officials that he wanted the toilet in his bathroom to rise higher in the air than anyone else's.

Fischer played beautifully in the first game. Spassky resigned on his forty-ninth move. Considering that Fischer had been away from formal competitive chess for two decades, this was no small accomplishment. But the rest of the match featured less-inspiring play. Although Spassky was clearly outclassed, the contest dragged on for almost six weeks before Fischer was finally declared the victor, with ten wins, five losses, and fifteen draws. Today Fischer attacks critics who dismiss the significance of the rematch. "I hadn't played in twenty years!" he bellowed during one of his Philippine radio broadcasts. "I did what was utterly impossible. It's still my greatest match."

The Bush Administration wasn't impressed. Fischer was immediately indicted, and an arrest warrant was issued. He hasn't returned to the United States since.

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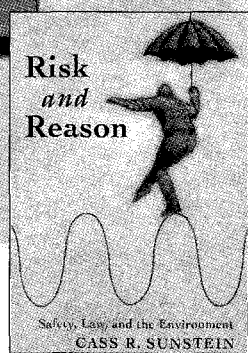
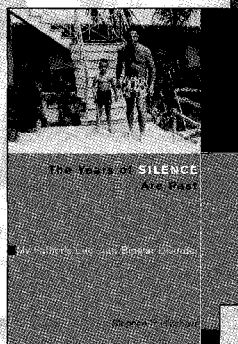
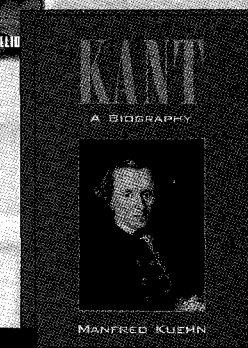
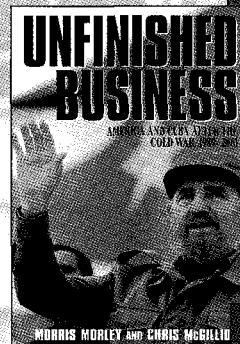
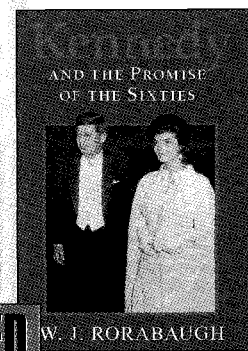
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Cass R. Sunstein

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Fischer stayed in Yugoslavia after the rematch, and began promoting what he called Fischer Random Chess—a tweaked version of shuffle chess, in which both players' back-row pieces are arranged according to the same random shuffle before play begins. Although not revolutionary, the premise of FRC is compelling: with 960 different starting positions, opening theory becomes obsolete, and the strongest player—not necessarily the player who has memorized more strategies or has the most expensive chess-analysis software—is assured victory.

Fischer envisioned FRC as a means of democratizing chess and as a lucrative business venture—and as an easy way to reinsert himself into the world of competitive chess without having to immerse himself in opening theory. He had designed and patented two electronic devices that he hoped to sell to FRC enthusiasts: a clock for timing games, and a pyramid-shaped “shuffler” to determine the starting positions. A 1996 press release described the two instruments as “essential to playing according to the new rules for the game of chess.” Fischer desperately wanted the Tokyo-based watch company Seiko to manufacture his FRC products but couldn't generate interest.

Worse than Seiko's snub was the loss of Zita. After less than a year she left

Fischer and, against his protestations, eventually wrote a book that chronicled their relationship. After the book's release he accused Zita of being a spy hired by the Jews to lure him out of retirement.

Following the breakup Fischer roamed around Central Europe for several years. He ended up being befriended by Susan and Judit Polgar, two young Hungarian Jews who were at the time the Venus and Serena Williams of the chess world. “I first met Bobby with my family,” Susan recalls. “I told him rather than spending the rest of his life hiding ... he should move to Budapest, where there are a lot of chess players.”

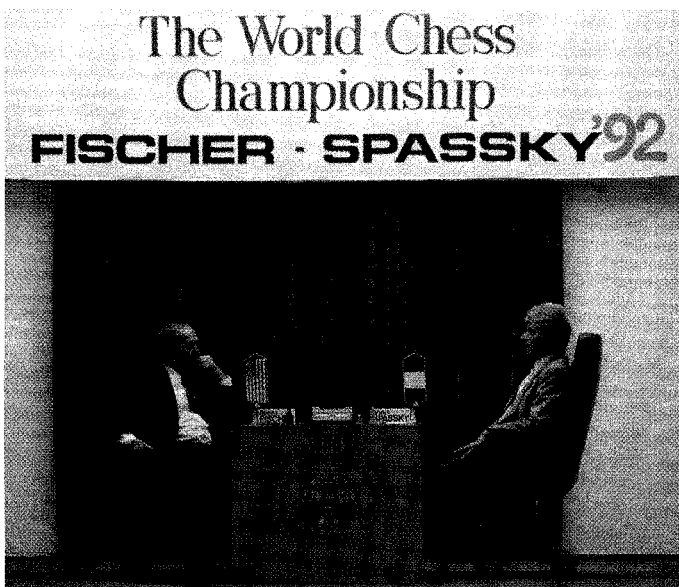
Fischer did, and was welcomed as a guest in the Polgar household. He appears to have behaved himself. “I remember happy times in the kitchen cutting mushrooms,” Susan says. “He's very normal in that sense, very pleasant.” Although Fischer refused to play classic chess, he graciously helped the Polgar sisters with their games. When he wasn't sharing his expert analysis with them, he was playing FRC games against them. He was astounded at how accomplished the sisters were. Seeing that he was impressed

by the Polgars' play, a friend of Fischer's suggested a publicized match to promote FRC. Fischer agreed.

Fischer was well aware that a high-stakes match pitting the game's strongest male player (in his own mind, anyway) against Judit Polgar, the game's strongest female player (now ranked in the top ten in the world), would interest the media. But the battle-of-the-sexes extravaganza was not to be. “The Jewish-nonsense stuff caused a problem between Bobby and the girls' father,” says a Fischer confidant. “One day Bobby just changed his mind. He said, ‘No, they're Jewish!’ He just couldn't handle it and walked away.”

Would Fischer be able to beat a top grand master in an FRC match today? Doubtful. He played numerous FRC games with Susan, who concedes that the results were “mixed.” She isn't optimistic about the prospect of a Fischer comeback either. “He's not that young anymore,” she says.

This may explain why Fischer now lives in Tokyo, where chess buffs are virtually nonexistent and he can live in complete anonymity. He walks into bars unrecognized and converses with women who have no idea who he is. “Bobby has always liked Japan,” says Larry Evans, the five-time U.S. chess champion. “He likes their subservient women.” The culture, too, is a draw, according to Harry Sneider. “Bobby loves Japanese food,” Sneider says, “the great mineral baths, and



Fischer and Spassky during their 1992 rematch, in Yugoslavia

the electronics.” Others, however, insist that Fischer chose Japan for a different reason. “Bobby needs to be in a place away from the Jews,” one woman says.

But Tokyo is only a home base. Fischer spends much of his time traveling around the world, spreading his gospel of hate. Live radio is his medium of choice. His *modus operandi* is to lull his audience into a false sense of security by reminiscing about past chess glories. Then, like clockwork, five minutes into the interview the conversation takes a detour—as it did on January 13, 1999, during Fischer’s very first live blitzkrieg, on Budapest’s Radio Calypso. After politely answering the stock questions, Fischer became noticeably agitated and launched into his now familiar diatribe.

“We might as well get to the heart of the matter and then we can come back to chitchat,” he curtly said to his host. “What is going on is that I am being persecuted night and day by the Jews!” Fischer proceeded to recite his bizarre list of grievances: the emergence and sale of FRC-clock knockoffs; a fortune owed him in unpaid book royalties; the unauthorized use of his name to promote the movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer*. His rage reached a peak when he began detailing the precious memorabilia allegedly stolen from his Bekins storage room in Pasadena. Lost treasures supposedly include a book from President Nixon and a letter from Ferdinand Marcos.

Fischer’s claims range from suspect to spurious. All U.S. book royalties due him have been paid (since 2000 they have been held in escrow by the State of California, because Fischer has not provided a taxpayer-identification number). A movie can be titled *Searching for Bobby Fischer* without his consent. Unauthorized “Fischer Method” clocks, which he claims infringe on his patent (expired in November of 2001, because of overdue maintenance fees), may or may not be legal. But the issue is irrelevant, because Fischer refuses to file suit (“The Jews control the courts”).

As for the Bekins theft, it, too, is a fiction. He did maintain a Bekins storage room in Pasadena for twelve years, and the memorabilia inside it were confiscated, but not in some nefarious plot. The contents of the storage room were sold at a public auction, because Fischer’s account—maintained by a Pasadena businessman named Bob Ellsworth, whom Fischer had met through the Worldwide Church of God—was in arrears. The Pasadena storage facility had been sold in the late 1990s, and the new owners noticed that the account was overdue. “It was my responsibility to pay the bill, and I didn’t pay it because I didn’t know there were new owners,” Ellsworth says. “So they put Bobby’s stuff up for auction. I felt really bad and spent about eight thousand dollars of my own money buying back all the significant memorabilia.”

The storage room was not a treasure trove worth “hundreds of millions of dollars,” as Fischer has claimed. “A lot of it,” Ellsworth says, “was old magazines and things that were of personal interest to Bobby: books on conspiracy theories, racy Mexican comics, lots of John Gunther books. Things you could go down to Olvera Street and replace for a dime a copy. That stuff I passed on. But anything of intrinsic value I snagged.” At the auction Ellsworth acquired “about 80 percent” of the various lots.

Harry Sneider corroborates Ellsworth’s story, and says that his son personally delivered the reclaimed memorabilia to Fischer in Budapest. When a list of the numbered lots was read off to him, Sneider confirmed that each one is again in Fischer’s possession. Lot 151: Box Lot of Telegrams to Bobby Fischer During World Chess Championship. “Delivered.” Lot 152: Box Lot of Books Inscribed to Bobby Fischer (not by authors). “Delivered.” Lot 153: From the People of New York given to Bobby Fischer—Leather Scrapbook with Letter and Telegram from Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York City. “Delivered.”

Fischer denies all of this, and would like nothing better than to see Ellsworth

On the radio Fischer lulls his audience into a false sense of security by reminiscing about past chess glories. Then, like clockwork, he launches into his diatribe. “We might as well get to the heart of the matter,” he said during his very first broadcast, in 1999. “I am being persecuted night and day by the Jews!”

Tokyo is now Fischer's home base. He spends much of his time traveling around the world, spreading his gospel of hate. During a recent interview, broadcast from Reykjavík, he encouraged Iceland to close the local U.S. naval base. "If they refuse to go," he said, "send them some letters with anthrax. They'll get the message."

drop dead—literally. During a Philippine radio interview broadcast on January 27, 1999, he instructed the host to read Ellsworth's home address on the air. "Some Filipino who loves me should say hello to that motherfucker," Fischer said. "Bob Ellsworth is worthy of death for this shit he pulled on me, in cahoots with Bekins. This was all orchestrated by the Jewish world governments."

Despite such conduct, friends in recent years have thought they detected a glimmer of light amid the darkness of Fischer's tortured psyche. For one thing, he has a girlfriend—Justine, a twenty-two-year-old Chinese-Filipina living in Manila, who couldn't care less about chess and has no intention of writing a tell-all memoir. And Fischer is now a parent: Justine gave birth to a baby girl in 2000. Fischer's fatherhood has until now been a well-kept secret, shared by his Philippine friends, who hope that this child will fill the void in Fischer's life that chess once occupied.

But their hope appears to be in vain. Fischer is a far cry from being a doting papa. According to one source, he "regularly sends money to his girlfriend and child" but visits them only "once every two months." Nobody has rescued him from his paranoid fantasies either. During his most recent radio interview, broadcast live from Reykjavík on January 27, 2002, Fischer rattled off the same Bekins "mega-robbery" drivel. He described the fictitious crime as "probably, in monetary terms, one of the biggest, if not the biggest robbery, in the history of the United States." He also encouraged the Icelandic government to close the local U.S. naval base. "If they refuse to go," Fischer said, "send them some letters with anthrax. They'll get the message."

For all the anti-American bluster, those closest to Fischer say he'd secretly like to return to his homeland. Sam Sloan, a chess writer and longtime friend of Fischer's, says, "If he knew he wouldn't be prosecuted for this executive order, I think he'd come back." It seems that Fischer has a sentimental side. Difficult as it is for some former friends to believe, he still thinks about them. "Bobby called someone in New York recently," says Stuart Margulies, a co-author (with Fischer and Donn Mosenfelder) of *Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess* (1966). "He wanted to know how all his old friends were doing."

This covert homesickness may explain why for a time Fischer continued to pay property taxes on a piece of Florida real estate he was unable to set foot on. But returning to America is no more real a possibility than the rook-shaped house he once dreamed of building. The federal arrest warrant issued in 1992 will not expire, and it is unlikely that Fischer will be shown much leniency—especially since he referred to George W. Bush during one of his radio interviews as "borderline retarded."

It's almost certain that he won't play chess competitively again. But the chess world continues to sing his praises. Last December, for example, the World Chess Hall of Fame opened for business—a rook-shaped building situated on an unlikely strip of land just off the Florida Turnpike, in South Miami-Dade County—and inducted the initial five members. One of them was Bobby Fischer.

Nevertheless, Fischer is now more alone than ever before. His mother and sister both died in the late 1990s. According to friends, he was extremely close to Joan and had reconciled with Regina; not being able to attend their funerals is said to have been a great blow to him. The New York chess players he periodically inquires about have broken all contact with him. As for Justine and his daughter, they appear to be an inconvenience, a distraction best kept at arm's length. Once one of the most famous men in the world, Fischer is now nothing more than a ghost—a shrill, disembodied voice heard only in faraway countries. ■

Rene Chun, a New York-based journalist, has written for numerous publications, including The New York Times, Esquire, and New York magazine.



RITE *by Guy Billout*

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INTERRACIAL INTIMACY

*White-black dating, marriage, and adoption are on the rise.
This development, however, is being met with resistance—
more vocally by blacks than by whites*

BY RANDALL KENNEDY

.....

Americans are already what racial purists have long feared: a people characterized by a great deal of racial admixture, or what many in the past referred to distastefully as “mongrelization.” In pigmentation, width of noses, breadth of lips, texture of hair, and other telltale signs, the faces and bodies of millions of Americans bear witness to interracial sexual encounters. Some were joyful, passionate, loving affairs. Many were rapes. Others contained elements of both choice and coercion. These different kinds of interracial intimacy and sexual depredation all reached their peak in the United States during the age of slavery, and following the Civil War they decreased markedly. Since the end of the civil-rights revolution interracial dating, interracial sex, and interracial marriage have steadily increased, as has the number of children born of interracial unions. This development has prompted commentators to speak of the “creolization” or “browning” or “beiging” of America.

Over the years legions of white-supremacist legislators, judges, prosecutors, police officers, and other officials have attempted to prohibit open romantic interracial attachments, particularly those between black men and white women. From the 1660s to the 1960s, forty-one territories, colonies, or states enacted laws—anti-miscegenation statutes—barring sex or marriage between blacks and whites, and many states ultimately made marriage across the color line a felony. Such laws crystallized attitudes about interracial intimacy that remain influential today, but all were invalidated by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967, in the most aptly named case in all of American constitutional history: *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia*. Although white and black Americans are far more likely to date and marry within their own race than outside it, the cultural environment has changed considerably since *Loving*. Recall what happened in the spring of 2000, when George W. Bush, at a crucial moment in his primary campaign, paid a highly publicized visit to Bob Jones University, in South Carolina. During

that visit he offered no criticism of the university’s then existing prohibition against interracial dating. In the controversy that ensued, no nationally prominent figures defended Bob Jones’s policy. Public opinion not only forced Bush to distance himself from Bob Jones but also prompted the notoriously stubborn and reactionary administration of that institution to drop its ban.

The de-stigmatization in this country of interracial intimacy is profoundly encouraging. Against the tragic backdrop of American history, it is a sign that Frederick Douglass may have been right when he prophesied, even before the abolition of slavery, that eventually “the white and colored people of this country [can] be blended into a common nationality, and enjoy together . . . the inestimable blessings of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

The great but altogether predictable irony is that just as white opposition to white-black intimacy finally lessened, during the last third of the twentieth century, black opposition became vocal and aggressive. In college classrooms today, when discussions about the ethics of interracial dating and marriage arise, black students are frequently the ones most likely to voice disapproval.

MARITAL INTEGRATION

Despite some ongoing resistance (a subject to which I will return), the situation for people involved in interracial intimacy has never been better. For the most part, the law prohibits officials from taking race into account in licensing marriages, making child-custody decisions, and arranging adoptions. Moreover, the American public accepts interracial intimacy as it never has before. This trend will almost certainly continue; polling data and common observation indicate that young people tend to be more liberal on these matters than their elders.

In 1960 there were about 51,000 black-white married couples in the United States; in 1970 there were 65,000, in

1980 there were 121,000, in 1990 there were 213,000, and by 1998 the number had reached 330,000. In other words, in the past four decades black-white marriages increased more than sixfold. And black-white marriages are not only becoming more numerous. Previously, the new couples in mixed marriages tended to be older than other brides and grooms. They were frequently veterans of divorce, embarking on second or third marriages. In recent years, however, couples in mixed marriages seem to be marrying younger than their pioneering predecessors and seem more inclined to have children and to pursue all the other "normal" activities that married life offers.

It should be stressed that black-white marriages remain remarkably rare—fewer than one percent of the total. In 1998, when 330,000 black-white couples were married, 55,305,000 couples were married overall. Moreover, the racial isolation of blacks on the marriage market appears to be greater than that of other people of color: much larger percentages of Native Americans and Asian-Americans marry whites. According to 1990 Census data, in the age cohort twenty-five to thirty-four, 36 percent of U.S.-born Asian-American husbands and 45 percent of U.S.-born Asian-American wives had white spouses; 53 percent of Native American husbands and 54 percent of Native American wives had white spouses. Only eight percent of African-American husbands and only four percent of African-American wives had white spouses. The sociologist Nathan Glazer was correct in stating, in *The Public Interest* (September 1995), that "blacks stand out uniquely among the array of American ethnic and racial groups in the degree to which marriage remains within the group." Of course, the Native American and Asian-American populations are so much smaller than the African-American population that relatively few intermarriages make a big difference in percentage terms. But the disparity is real: it has to do not only with demographics but also with generations' worth of subjective judgments about marriageability, beauty, personality, comfort, compatibility, and prestige. Even now a wide array of social pressures continue to make white-black marriages more difficult and thus less frequent than other interethnic or interracial marriages.

Nevertheless, the trend toward more interracial marriage is clear, as is a growing acceptance of the phenomenon. Successful, high-profile interracial couples include the white William Cohen (a former senator from Maine and the Secretary of Defense under Bill Clinton) and the black Janet Langhart; and the white Wendy Raines and the black Franklin Raines (he is a former director of the Office of Management and Budget and the CEO of Fannie Mae). Some African-Americans whose positions make them directly dependent on black public opinion have nonetheless married whites without losing their footing. A good example is Julian Bond, the chairman of the board of directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People. Though married to a white woman, Bond ascended to the chairmanship of the oldest and most influential black-advancement organization in the country in 1998, and as of this writing continues to enjoy widespread support within the NAACP.

There are other signs that black-white romance has become more widely accepted; indeed, it is quite fashionable in some contexts. One is advertising. When advertisers addressing general audiences use romance to deliver their messages, they most often depict couples of the same race. But now at least occasionally one sees interracial couples deployed as enticements to shop at Diesel or Club Monaco, or to buy furniture from Ikea, jeans from Guess, sweaters from Tommy Hilfiger, cologne from Calvin Klein, or water from Perrier.

Scores of interracial support groups have emerged across the country, among them Kaleidoscope, at the University of Virginia; Students of Mixed Heritage at Amherst College; Interracial Family Club, in Washington, D.C.; Half and Half, at Bryn Mawr; and Mixed Plate, at Grinnell. Although most of these organizations lack deep roots, many display a vigor and resourcefulness that suggest they will survive into the foreseeable future. They stem from and represent a community in the making. It is a community united by a demand that the larger society respect and be attentive to people who by descent or by choice fall outside conventional racial groupings: interracial couples, parents of children of a different race, and children of parents of a different race. Those within this community want it known that they are not products or agents of an alarming mongrelization, as white racists still believe; nor are they inauthentic and unstable in-betweeners, as some people of color would have it. They want security amid the established communities from which they have migrated. They want to emerge from what the writer Lise Funderburg has identified as the "racial netherworld," and they want to enjoy interaction with others without regret or fear, defensiveness or embarrassment.

"SLEEPING WHITE"

African-Americans largely fall into three camps with respect to white-black marriage. One camp, relatively small, openly champions it as a good. Its members argue that increasing rates of interracial marriage will decrease social segregation, encourage racial open-mindedness, enhance blacks' access to enriching social networks, elevate their status, and empower black women in their interactions with black men by subjecting the latter to greater competition in the marketplace for companionship.

A second camp sees interracial marriage merely as a choice that individuals should have the right to make. For example, while noting in *Race Matters* (1993) that "more and more white Americans are willing to interact sexually with black Americans *on an equal basis*," Cornel West main-



tains that he views this as “neither cause for celebration nor reason for lament.” This is probably the predominant view among blacks. It allows a person simultaneously to oppose anti-miscegenation laws and to disclaim any desire to marry across racial lines. Many African-Americans are attracted to this position, because, among other things, it helps to refute a deeply annoying assumption on the part of many whites: that blacks would like nothing more than to be intimate with whites and even, if possible, to become white.

A third camp opposes interracial marriage, on the grounds that it expresses racial disloyalty, suggests disapproval of fellow blacks, undermines black culture, weakens the African-American marriage market, and feeds racist mythologies, particularly the canard that blacks lack pride of race.

Such opposition has always been a powerful undercurrent. When Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP, divorced his black wife (the mother of their two children) and married a white woman from South Africa, in 1949, the Norfolk (Virginia) *Journal and Guide* spoke for

many blacks when it asserted, “A prompt and official announcement that [White] will not return to his post . . . is in order.” Part of the anger stemmed from apprehension that segregationists would seize upon White’s marriage to substantiate the charge that what black male civil-rights activists were really after was sex with white women. Part stemmed from a widespread sense that perhaps White thought no black woman was good enough for him.

By the late 1960s, with the repudiation of anti-miscegenation and Jim Crow laws, increasing numbers of blacks felt emboldened to openly oppose mixed marriages. “We Shall Overcome” was giving way to “Black Power”: improving the image of blacks in the minds of whites seemed less important than cultivating a deeper allegiance to racial solidarity. To blacks, interracial intimacy compromised that allegiance. The African-American social reformer George Wiley dedicated himself to struggles for racial justice as a leading figure in the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and the founder of the National Welfare Rights Organization. Yet many black activists denounced him for marrying and remaining married to a white woman. When he addressed a rally in Washington, D.C., on African Liberation Day in April of 1972, a group of black women heckled him by chanting, “Where’s your white wife? Where’s your white wife?” When he attempted to focus his remarks on the situation of black women, the hecklers merely took up a different chant: “Talking black and sleeping white.”

Other politically active blacks married to whites—James Farmer, a founder of CORE, and Julius Hobson, a tenacious activist in Washington—faced similar pressure. Julius Lester, a longtime member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, wrote a book with one of the most arresting titles of that flamboyant era: *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power’s Gon’ Get Your Mama!* (1968). But to many black activists, Lester’s writings and ideas were decidedly less significant than his choice of a white wife. To them, his selection bespoke hypocrisy. Ridiculing Lester, one black woman wrote a letter to the editor of *Ebony* in which she suggested that it was foolish to regard him as a trustworthy leader. After all, she cautioned, he couldn’t even “crawl out of bed” with whites.

The “sleeping white” critique embarrassed a wide variety of people as distinctions between the personal and the political evaporated. At many colleges and universities black students ostracized other blacks who dated (much less married) whites. A black student who wanted to walk around “with a blonde draped on his arm” could certainly do so, a black student leader at the University of Washington told St. Clair Drake, a leading African-American sociologist. “All we say,” the student continued, “is don’t try to join the black studies association.” Drake himself became the target of this critique. When he visited his old high school in 1968, he says, the Black Student Union refused to have anything to do with him, because he was involved in an inter-

racial relationship. Drake's classmate Charles V. Hamilton, a co-author, with Stokely Carmichael, of *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967), was shunned for the same reason.

In some instances black opposition to interracial intimacy played a part in destroying a marriage. A dramatic example is the breakup of Everett LeRoi Jones (now known as Amiri Baraka) and Hettie Jones. LeRoi Jones was born of middle-class black parents in Newark, New Jersey, in 1934. For two years he attended Howard University, which he detested. He served in the Air Force for a short time, and in 1957 he moved to Greenwich Village. He worked for the magazine *Record Changer* and was a co-editor, with Hettie Cohen, of *Yugen*, an avant-garde magazine that published writings by William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Charles Olson, and Jones himself. Hettie Cohen was a woman of Jewish parentage who had grown up in suburban New York and attended Mary Washington, the women's college of the University of Virginia. Jones and Cohen married in 1958. Although his parents accepted the marriage easily, her parents totally opposed it.

For a while LeRoi and Hettie Jones lived together in what she remembers as a loving relationship. But then the pressure of bohemian penury, the demands of two children, and mutual infidelities (including one in which LeRoi fathered a baby by another woman who also happened to be white) caused their marriage to falter. Other forces also emerged to doom the union: LeRoi's deep internal tensions, his ambition to become a black leader, and the growing sense in many black communities that no purported leader could be trusted who "talked black but slept white."

As the black protest movement gathered steam in the early sixties, Jones aimed at becoming an important figure in it. At the same time, his career as a writer blossomed. He wrote well-regarded poetry, social and political essays, and a significant book, *Blues People* (1963), on the history of African-American music. What made LeRoi Jones a celebrity, however, and what ensures him a niche in American literary history, is his two-act play *Dutchman*, which opened in New York City in March of 1964. In *Dutchman* a reticent, bookish middle-class black man named Clay meets a white temptress named Lula in a New York subway car. The play consists mainly of their verbal combat. Angered by Clay's refusal to dance with her, Lula shouts, "Come on, Clay. Let's rub bellies on the train ... Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let's knock stomachs. Clay, you liver-lipped white man. You would-be Christian. You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man." Clay responds in kind.

"Tallulah Bankhead! ... Don't you tell me anything! If I'm a middle-class fake white man ... let me be ... Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It's none of your business ... I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats ...

You great liberated whore! You fuck some black man, and right away you're an expert on black people. What a lotta shit that is."

But Lula has the last word, so to speak: she suddenly stabs Clay to death. Other passengers throw his body out of the subway car and depart. Alone, Lula re-occupies her seat. When another black man enters the car, she begins her lethal routine anew.

Though living in a predominantly white, bohemian environment when he wrote *Dutchman*, Jones had begun to believe that it was blacks to whom he should be addressing his art. Increasingly successful, he was also becoming increasingly radical in his condemnation of white American society. Asked by a white woman what white people could do to help the race problem, Jones replied, "You can help by dying. You are a cancer. You can help the world's people with your death." An outrageous statement coming from anyone, this comment was even more arresting coming from a man who was married to a white woman. Jones was by no means alone in living within this particular contradiction. He noted in his autobiography that at one point he and some other black intellectuals objected to the presence of white radicals on a committee they were in the process of establishing. "What was so wild," he recalled, "was that some of us were talking about how we didn't want white people on the committee but we were all hooked up to white women ... Such were the contradictions of that period of political organization."

The more prominent Jones became, however, the more critics, both black and white, charged him with being hypocritical. The critic Stanley Kauffmann, for example, asserted that Jones constituted an exemplary figure in "the Tradition of the Fake." Stung by such charges, infatuated with black-nationalist rhetoric, inspired by the prospect of re-creating himself, and bored with a disappointing marriage, LeRoi Jones divorced Hettie Jones in 1965.

Throughout the black-power era substantial numbers of African-Americans loudly condemned black participation in interracial relationships (especially with whites), deeming it to be racial betrayal. A reader named Joyce Blake searingly articulated this sentiment in a letter to the editor of the *Village Voice*.

It really hurts and baffles me and many other black sisters to see our black brothers (?) coming down the streets in their African garbs with a white woman on their arms. It is fast becoming a standard joke among the white girls that they can get our men still—African styles and all ...

It certainly seems to many black sisters that the Movement is just another subterfuge to aid the Negro male in procuring a white woman. If this be so, then the black sisters don't need it, for surely we have suffered enough humiliation from both white and black men in America.

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A DEMOGRAPHIC BETRAYAL?

Although racial solidarity has been the principal reason for black opposition to intermarriage over the years, another reason is the perception that intermarriage by black men weakens black women in the marriage market. A reader named Lula Miles asserted this view in an August 1969 letter to the editor of *Ebony*. Responding to a white woman who had expressed bewilderment at black women's anger, Miles wrote, "Non-sister wonders why the sight of a black man with a white woman is revolting to a black woman ... The name of the game is 'competition.' Non-sister, you are trespassing!"

Another letter writer, named Miraonda J. Stevens, reinforced this point: "In the near future there aren't going to be enough nice black men around for us [black women] to marry." This "market" critique of interracial marriage has a long history. In 1929 Palestine Wells, a black columnist for the Baltimore *Afro-American*, wrote,

I have a sneaking suspicion that national intermarriage will make it harder to get husbands. A girl has a hard time enough getting a husband, but methinks 'twill be worse. Think how awful it would be if all the ofay girls with a secret hankering for brown skin men, could openly compete with us.

Forty-five years later an *Ebony* reader named Katrina Williams echoed Wells. "The white man is marrying the white woman," she wrote. "The black man is marrying the white woman. Who's gonna marry me?"

Behind her anxious question resides more than demographics: there is also the perception that large numbers of African-American men believe not only that white women are relatively more desirable but that black women are positively unattractive. Again the pages of *Ebony* offer vivid testimony. A reader named Mary A. Dowdell wrote in 1969,

Let's just lay all phony excuses aside and get down to the true nitty, nitty, NITTY-GRITTY and tell it like it really is. Black males hate black women just because they are black. The whole so-called Civil Rights Act was really this: "I want a white woman because she's white and I not only hate but don't want a black woman because she's black." ... The whole world knows this.

Decades later African-American hostility to interracial intimacy remained widespread and influential. Three examples are revealing. The first is the movie *Jungle Fever* (1991), which portrays an interracial affair set in New York City in the early 1990s. The director, Spike Lee, made sure the relationship was unhappy. Flipper Purify is an ambitious, college-educated black architect who lives in Harlem with his black wife and their young daughter. Angie Tucci, a young white woman, works for Purify as a secretary. Educated only through high school, she lives in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, with her father and brothers, all of whom are

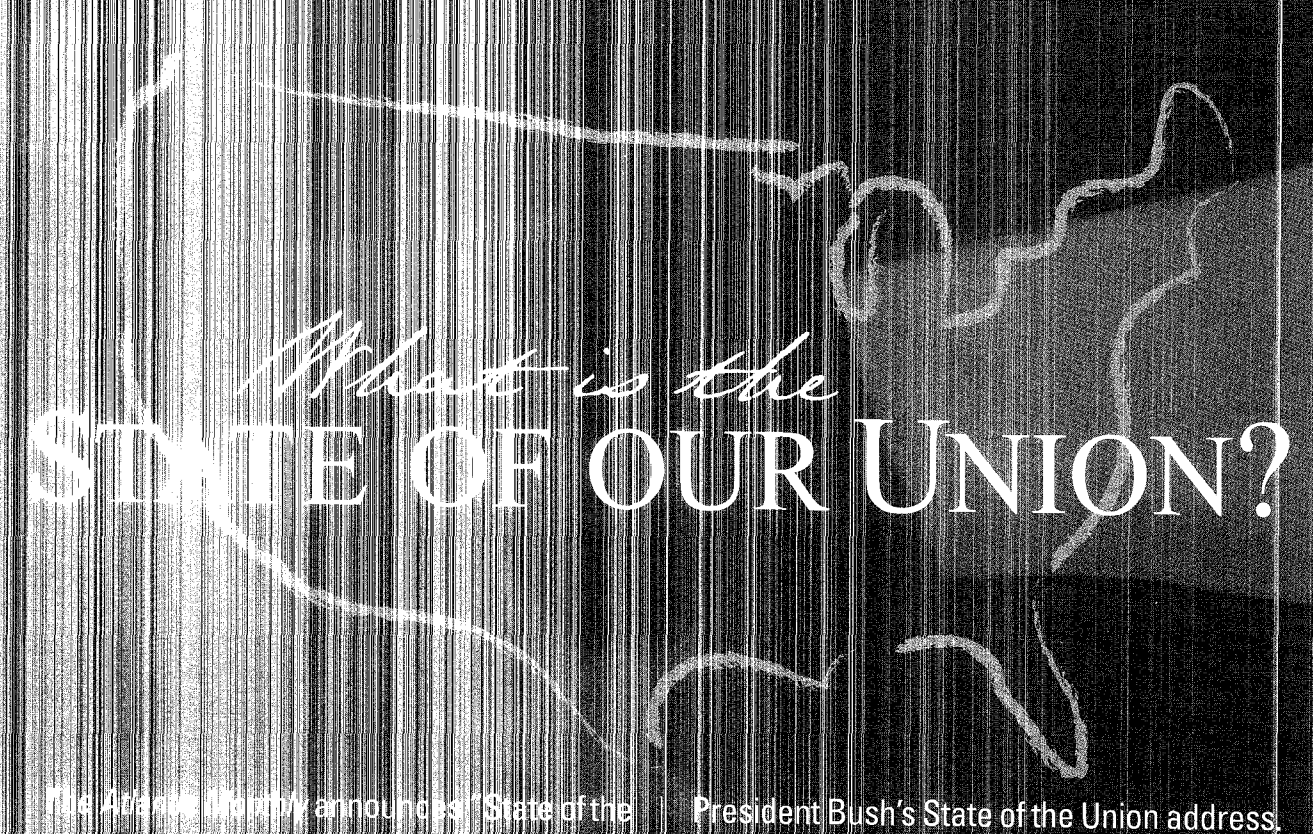
outspoken racists. One evening when Flipper and Angie stay late at his office, work is superseded by erotic longing tinged with racial curiosity. He has never been sexually intimate with a white woman, and she has never been sexually intimate with a black man. They close that gap in their experience, and then stupidly confide in indiscreet friends, who carelessly reveal their secret. Angie's father throws her out of the family home after viciously beating her for "fucking a black nigger." Flipper's wife, Drew, throws him out as well. Flipper and Angie move into an apartment together, but that arrangement falls apart rather quickly under the pressure of their own guilt and uncertainty and the strong disapproval they encounter among blacks and whites alike.

The second example is Lawrence Otis Graham's 1995 essay "I Never Dated a White Girl." Educated at Princeton University and Harvard Law School, Graham sought to explain why "black middle-class kids ... [who are] raised in integrated or mostly white neighborhoods, [and] told to befriend white neighbors, socialize and study with white classmates, join white social and professional organizations, and go to work for mostly white employers" are also told by their relatives, "Oh, and by the way, don't ever forget that you are black, and that you should never get so close to whites that you happen to fall in love with them." Graham did more than explain, however; he justified this advice in a candid polemic that might well have been titled "Why I Am Proud That I Never Dated a White Girl."

The third example is "Black Men, White Women: A Sister Relinquishes Her Anger," a 1993 essay by the novelist Bebe Moore Campbell. Describing a scene in which she and her girlfriends spied a handsome black celebrity escorting a white woman at a trendy Beverly Hills restaurant, Campbell wrote,

In unison, we moaned, we groaned, we rolled our eyes heavenward. We gnashed our teeth in harmony and made ugly faces. We sang "Umph! Umph! Umph!" a cappella-style, then shook our heads as we lamented for the ten thousandth time the perfidy of black men and cursed trespassing white women who dared to "take our men." ... Before lunch was over I had a headache, indigestion, and probably elevated blood pressure.

Only a small percentage of black men marry interracially; one report, published in 1999, estimated that seven percent of married black men have non-black wives. But with poverty, imprisonment, sexual orientation, and other factors limiting the number of marriageable black men, a substantial number of black women feel this loss of potential mates acutely. In 1992 researchers found that for every three unmarried black women in their twenties there was only one unmarried black man with earnings above the poverty level. Given these realities, black women's disparagement of interracial marriage should come as no



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surprise. "In a drought," Campbell wrote, "even one drop of water is missed."

Compiling a roster of prominent blacks—Clarence Thomas, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Quincy Jones, Franklin A. Thomas, John Edgar Wideman—married to or otherwise romantically involved with whites, Graham voiced disappointment. When a prominent black role model "turns out to be married to a white mate," he wrote, "our children say, 'Well, if it's so good to be black, why do all my role models date and marry whites?' ... As a child growing up in the 'black is beautiful' 1970s, I remember asking these questions."

Anticipating the objection that his views amount to "reverse racism," no less an evil than anti-black bigotry, Graham wrote that his aim was neither keeping the races separate nor assigning superiority to one over the other. Rather, he wanted to develop "solutions for the loss of black mentors and role models at a time when the black community is overrun with crime, drug use, a high dropout rate, and a sense that any black who hopes to find ... career success must necessarily disassociate himself from his people with the assistance of a white spouse." He maintained,

It's not the discrete decision of any one of these individuals that makes black America stand up and take notice. It is the cumulative effect of each of these personal decisions that bespeaks a frightening pattern for an increasingly impoverished and wayward black community. The cumulative effect is that the very blacks who are potential mentors and supporters of a financially and psychologically depressed black community are increasingly deserting the black community en masse, both physically and emotionally.

THE CASE FOR AMALGAMATION

Although Graham's view is widespread, there are blacks who not only tolerate but applaud increasing rates of interracial intimacy. The most outspoken and distinguished African-American proponent of free trade in the marital marketplace is the Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson. Patterson makes three main claims. First, he maintains that interracial marriage typically gives people access to valuable new advice, know-how, and social networks. "When we marry," he writes in *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*, "we engage in an exchange of social and cultural dowries potentially far more valuable than gold-rimmed china. The cultural capital exchanged in ethnic intermarriage is considerably greater than that within ethnic groups."

Patterson's second claim is that removing the informal racial boundaries within the marriage market would especially benefit black women—because large numbers of white men are and will increasingly become open to marrying black women, if given a chance. He notes that if only one in five nonblack men were to court black women, the

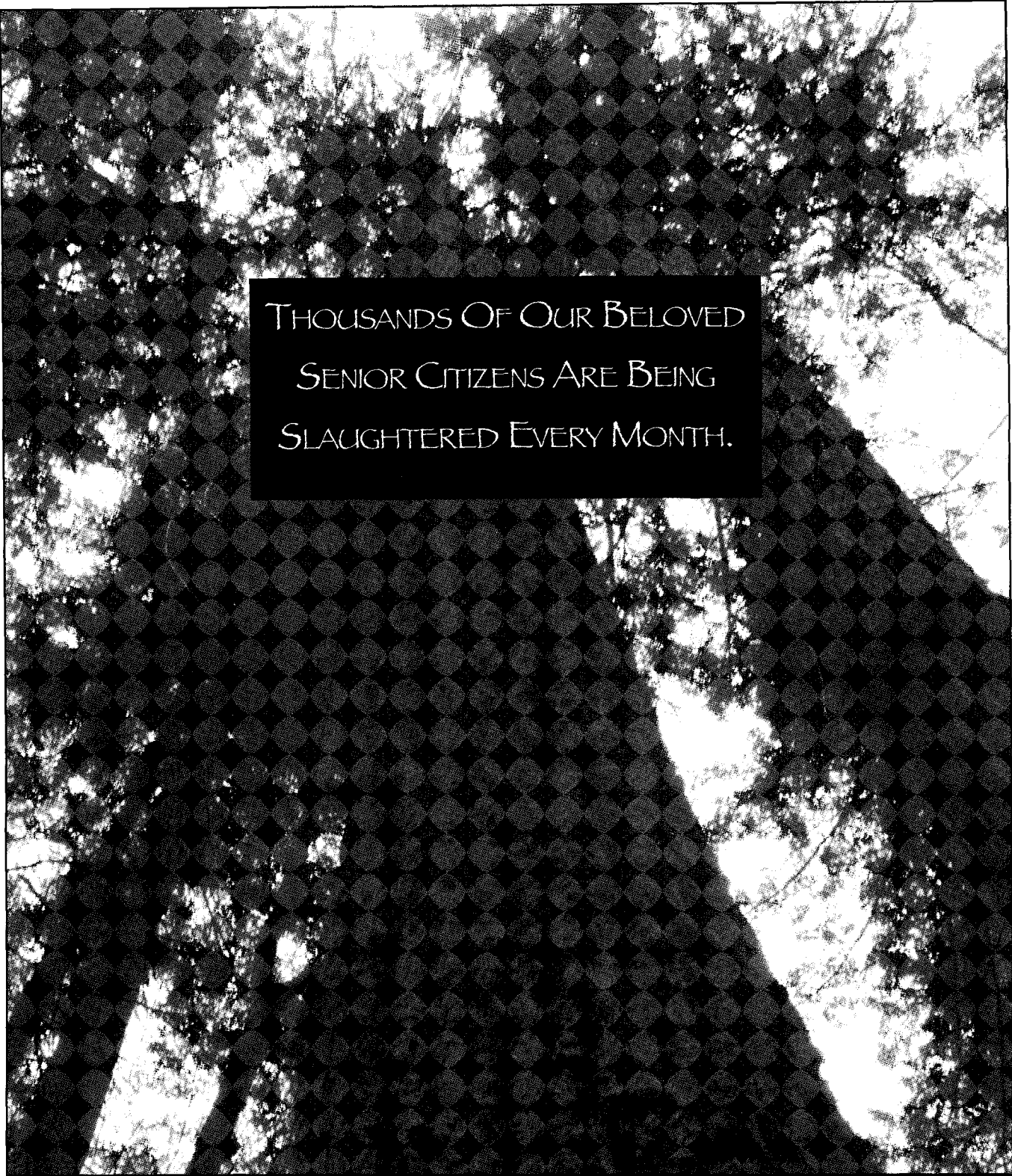
pool of potential spouses available to those women would immediately double. According to Patterson, this would be good not only because it would make marriage more accessible to black women but also because larger numbers of white (and other) suitors might well fortify black women in their dealings with black men. As Patterson sees it, by forswearing nonblack suitors, many black women have senselessly put themselves at the mercy of black men, who have declined to be as accommodating as they might be in the face of greater competition.

Patterson's third claim is that widespread intermarriage is necessary to the integration of blacks into American society. He agrees with the writer Calvin Hernton that intermarriage is "the crucial test in determining when a people have completely won their way into the mainstream of any given society." In *Ordeals of Integration* he therefore urges blacks, particularly women, to renounce their objections to interracial intimacy. Higher rates of intermarriage "will complete the process of total integration as [blacks] become to other Americans not only full members of the political and moral community, but also people whom 'we' marry," he counsels. "When that happens, the goal of integration will have been fully achieved."

Some may question whether higher rates of interracial marriage will do as much or signify as much as Patterson contends. The history of racially divided societies elsewhere suggests that it will not. Addressing "the uncertain legacy of miscegenation," Professor Anthony W. Marx, of Columbia University, writes that despite considerable race mixing in Brazil, and that country's formal repudiation of racism, Brazil nonetheless retains "an informal racial order that [discriminates] against 'blacks and browns.'" Contrary to optimistic projections, Brazil's multiracialism did not so much produce upward mobility for dark Brazilians as reinforce a myth of mobility. That myth has undergirded a pigmentocracy that continues to privilege whiteness. A similar outcome is possible in the United States. Various peoples of color—Latinos, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and light-skinned African-Americans—could well intermarry with whites in increasingly large numbers and join with them in a de facto alliance against darker-skinned blacks, who might remain racial outcasts even in a more racially mixed society.

Historically, though, at least in the United States, openness to interracial marriage has been a good barometer of racial enlightenment in thought and practice. As a general rule, those persons most welcoming of interracial marriage (and other intimate interracial associations) are also those who have most determinedly embraced racial justice, a healthy respect for individualistic pluralism, and a belief in the essential oneness of humanity. ■

Randall Kennedy is a professor at Harvard Law School. He is the author of Nigger (2002) and Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption, to be published next year.



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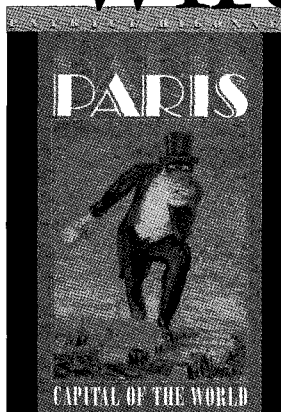
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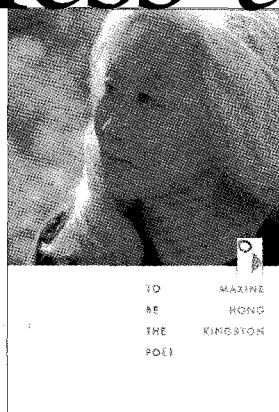
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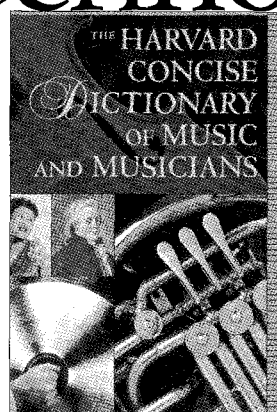
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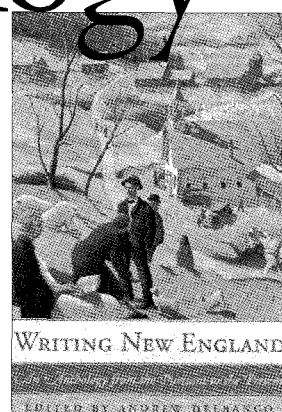
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AQUERÒ

A short story

BY MELISSA HARDY

.....

TESTIMONY OF MOTHER MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAUZOU FEBRUARY 2, 1899

Mother Marie-Thérèse Vauzou, once the mistress of novices at the Convent of Saint-Gildard but now her order's superior general, judiciously lowered her bulk into the very armchair in which her former charge, Bernadette Soubirous, had died so many years before. The elderly nun was not padded so much as plated with fat, like a stately rhinoceros. The angle of the chair was intended to promote reclining. Nevertheless, the Benedictine brother charged with taking the superior general's testimony understood that Mother Vauzou was determined to sit erect, which feat, after some adjustment and repositioning, she managed to accomplish. Now, perched on the edge of the chair, one liver-spotted hand folded over the other in her lap, she might have appeared quite composed were it not for a tic that made her right cheek jump every few seconds.

"So, if I'm to understand you correctly, Brother, they are talking of canonizing the little Soubirous?" Mother Vauzou spat out the question like a bad taste.

"They are," the Benedictine conceded.

She turned to look at him; her large face, wreathed in a wimple of starched white linen, hovered like a full moon over the blackness of her habit. She had wide-open eyes the color of smoked glass and an enormous beaked nose; her expression was disdainful. "A mistake, if you ask me!" the old nun hissed.

FIRST IDENTIFICATION OF THE BODY SEPTEMBER 22, 1909

Thirty years after the interment of the body of Bernadette Soubirous, to whom the Mother of God had appeared eighteen times in the Grotto of Massabielle, just outside the Pyrenean town of Lourdes, the Bishop of Nevers, Monsignor Gauthey, dispatched a messenger with a request that a Dr. David and a Dr. Jourdan attend at an exhumation to take place at the Convent of Saint-Gildard the following week.

"At long last, the work of the episcopal commission charged with investigating the merits of Bernadette

Soubirous's case has been completed and the saintly virtues of the Little Shepherdess thoroughly confirmed," Monsignor Gauthey wrote. "Our next step must be to identify the body and to determine the extent to which it has remained intact. It is incumbent upon my office to do this in accordance with both civil and canon law, in order to do which successfully, I require your assistance."

Accordingly, the two physicians and Monsignor Gauthey met at eight-thirty on the morning of the appointed day at the Chapel of Saint-Joseph in the Convent of Saint-Gildard, where the body of Bernadette Soubirous had been laid to rest. They were joined by five others: Abbé Perreau; Mother Superior Marie-Josephine Forestier and her deputy, Sister Alexandrine; and the mayor and deputy mayor of Nevers. Also in attendance were two stonemasons and two carpenters, who were to see to the practical matters at hand.

Acting on the bishop's instructions, the two stonemasons lifted the massive stone from the vault and, with some difficulty, managed to half pry and half wrestle the wooden coffin out of it.

"Not exactly light as a feather, was she?" one mason muttered to his colleague in mid-negotiation.

"A lead coffin is inside the wooden one," the second mason snapped back. "Standard procedure in these cases. Why do you think I brought the 'can opener'?" Then, to the carpenters, "You there! How about some help carrying this thing!"

The four men staggered under the coffin's weight into the room adjacent to the chapel, where the examination was to take place. They set it down carefully on two trestles and proceeded first to unscrew the lid and then to shear open the lead coffin within. As the masons bent over this task and the metal cutters bit into the lead, everyone stiffened in expectation of a terrible stench: the nuns discreetly applied handkerchiefs to their nostrils and turned slightly away, while the gentlemen concentrated their expressions in such a way that their lips were pursed shut and their nostrils reduced to mere slits.

Then Dr. David spoke. "I say, Jourdan!" he exclaimed. "There's not a trace of an odor!"

The nuns removed the handkerchiefs from their noses and sniffed the air hesitantly. "It's true!" the mother superior said. "How very extraordinary!"

By now the masons had managed to peel back the metal lid. Everyone took two tentative steps nearer to the coffin and peered in.

"Only look, Monsignor!" the deputy mayor said to the bishop. "The body is perfectly preserved! Apart from seeming ... rather wan."

"Only to be expected under the circumstances," the mayor commented to the mother superior.

Sister Alexandrine inhaled deeply. "I smell something!" she announced. "I smell ... lilies!"

"You smell no such thing, Alexandrine!" Mother Forestier chastised her. "You're overexcited."

As for the carpenters and stonemasons, they only stared at the body of the beautiful Bernadette, gulping, their eyes wide with astonishment. Then one of the masons crossed himself and his three colleagues quickly followed suit.

TESTIMONY OF MOTHER MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAUZOU FEBRUARY 2, 1899

"I am here on the instructions of the episcopal commission, Mother Vauzou," the Benedictine informed the superior general, as dry as toast. "Naturally they are interested in your opinion, although, as you will surely have heard, we have learned of cures.

Miraculous ones, and well documented. The commission cannot afford to ignore such apparent manifestations of Our Lady's grace. Surely you understand."

Mother Vauzou snorted. "Manifestations of Our Lady's grace," she muttered. "For the record, I should just like to state my great sadness that of all the good works I have done in my long life, of all my triumphs and achievements, the only thing anyone wishes to discuss with me is that wretched peasant girl. Proceed, sir."

He consulted his list of questions. "When did you first meet Bernadette Soubirous?" he asked.

"Sister *Marie-Bernard*, as I knew her, came to me some eight years after the last apparition," Mother Vauzou replied. "She was twenty-two years old. The reason for whisking her away to Nevers, so far from her native Bigorre, was not bruited about, for fear of scandal. The nuns in whose charge she had been placed feared for her virtue."

"Why was that?" the Benedictine asked.

"She was demonstrating signs of female weakness," the superior general replied stiffly. "Imagine, if you can, the distress of the poor sister who discovered Marie-Bernard trying to widen her skirt to create the effect of a crinoline underneath.

And that is not all! Later she was surprised in the act of introducing pieces of wood into her corset in an attempt to stiffen it further! Such acts were considered by the sisters in whose charge she was placed to be nothing less than diabolical."

"I see!" the Benedictine said.

"Marie-Bernard was terribly vain," Mother Vauzou continued. "She once told a fellow novice that she had joined the Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction because she preferred our headpiece to that of the Sisters of the Cross, which she compared to a funnel, and our habit to that of the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul, which she described as dowdy! Of course, I must concede both her points. But there was more."

"Yes?" the Benedictine said encouragingly.

"An infatuated medical student from Nantes had written the Bishop of Tarbes asking for her hand in marriage," Mother Vauzou exclaimed. "If I am not permitted to marry her, the distraught youth wrote, 'I think I will quit this world.' And perhaps he was compelled to do so, for it was inconceivable that anyone—however humble and, for want of a more precise word, simple—to whom the Holy Virgin was believed to have appeared should be permitted to breed."

"Naturally!" the Benedictine agreed.



SECOND IDENTIFICATION OF THE BODY APRIL 3, 1919

On August 13, 1913, thirty-four years after the death of the Little Shepherdess, Pope Pius X, by virtue of signing the Decree of Venerability, authorized the process by which Bernadette Soubirous might attain beatification and, ultimately, should her virtues be proved authentic, recognition as a saint of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. Unfortunately, the Great War interfered with the progress of Bernadette's case; but on April 3, 1919, the Seer of Lourdes's body was exhumed for the second time. This time the examination was conducted by Drs. Talon and Comte before witnesses who included Monsignor Gauthey's successor, Monsignor Chatelus; Mother Forestier; and her deputy, Sister Alexandrine. Also in attendance were the commissioner of police, representatives of the municipalities, and members of the Church tribunal.

Following the examination, the two men of science retired to write up their reports. They were dispatched to separate rooms to ensure that they could not consult each other as to this detail or that, and thus that one man's

KAMIL VOUNAR

observations would not taint or in any way color the other's.

Later, after Bernadette's body had been placed in a new coffin and reburied in the Chapel of Saint-Joseph, the bishop met with the two doctors in Mother Forestier's parlor and reviewed their reports over tea.

"Remarkably, I find that your reports coincide perfectly, not only with each other but also with those of Dr. Jourdan and Dr. David, made at the first exhumation, on September 22, 1909," Monsignor Chatelus told the two physicians. "Except in those several small particulars you mention, of course. Sister Alexandrine, if I could trouble you for another one of those delightful *langues-de-chat*?"

"But of course, Monsignor!"

"Indeed!" Dr. Comte replied. "The only changes I could observe in the lady's condition were those patches of mildew on the body and quite a notable layer of salt ..."

"Calcium salts, I think," Dr. Talon clarified.

"Probably the result of the body's having been washed the first time it was exhumed," his colleague speculated. "Precisely why I suggested dispensing with a second such bath, Mother Forestier."

"But of course, dear Dr. Comte," the mother superior murmured, a trifle embarrassed. "We were perhaps a little overzealous on the last occasion."

"So exciting!" Sister Alexandrine agreed. "To find our wondrous sister so uncorrupted, I mean. May I freshen your tea, Doctor?"

"Please," Dr. Talon replied.

"As for the skeleton, it is remarkably complete," Dr. Comte declared. "If it had not been, we could not possibly have conveyed the body to the examining table. Without its falling apart, I mean."

"And, not to be indelicate on this, but we detected no smell of putrefaction," Dr. Talon said. He glanced around the room. "No one present experienced any discomfort, I presume?" All shook their heads vigorously.

"Indeed," Sister Alexandrine trilled, "I would have to say that the exercise has been an entirely pleasant one. Who would like a petit four? Sister Casimir makes them, and they are so very good!"

TESTIMONY OF

MOTHER MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAUZOU

FEBRUARY 2, 1899

"Her family was perfectly dreadful," Mother Vauzou told the Benedictine. "They lived like pigs in a sty, all six of them crowded together into one tiny room."

"The father, I understand, was a bit of a ne'er-do-well," the Benedictine said. "Arrested twice. Once for stealing two bags of flour, and the second time for removing a plank of wood from the street. They were very poor. Did you know that Bernadette's little brother Jean-Marie was once caught eating the wax that had dripped from the candles in their parish church?"

"Their own fault, if you ask me!" Mother Vauzou said

gruffly. "No fortitude. No self-control. No discipline. Oh, I suppose they were well-meaning enough, but inept! Do you know what Marie-Bernard was *doing* when she first saw Our Lady? She was looking for bones to sell to the local ragpicker!"

"Blessed are the poor ...," the Benedictine began, but the nun cut him short.

"Don't start in on that!" she said.

THIRD IDENTIFICATION OF THE BODY

APRIL 18, 1925

On November 18, 1923, His Holiness declared Bernadette's virtues to be authentic. Her beatification was imminent.

"We may not yet refer to our famous sister as the *Blessed* Marie-Bernard," the mother superior informed her charges, "but we soon shall."

She immediately set about making arrangements for the third identification of the body, as required by canon law. "We shall need to avail ourselves of your services once again," she wrote Dr. Talon. To Dr. Comte, who was a surgeon, she added, "We hope you will be so kind as to remove a few tiny relics ... for Rome, Lourdes, and, of course, for ourselves here at Saint-Gildard and other houses of our order."

"I should be honored," Dr. Comte replied by letter.

Accordingly, on April 18, 1925, the bishop, the vicars general, the Church tribunal, and nuns from the community assembled in the little chapel of Saint-Joseph to witness the exhumation. Also in attendance, representing the municipal authorities, were the commissioner of police and a Monsieur Bruneton.

While the masons and carpenters were swearing an oath, "We hereby promise that we shall accomplish the task entrusted to our care to the utmost of our abilities!" Bruneton leaned over and murmured out of the corner of his mouth to the police commissioner, "Given the number of times they've exhumed her, they might have been better off to install her in a jack-in-the-box."

"*Shhh!*" the commissioner enjoined roughly. He was more devout than Bruneton, a freethinker. Besides, being newly appointed to his position, he had not been present at the previous identification, and was therefore intensely curious to see what a corpse looked like after so many years in the grave.

TESTIMONY OF

MOTHER MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAUZOU

FEBRUARY 2, 1899

"You have written to the commission that you object—'vigorously' is, I believe, the word you used—to this investigation," the Benedictine said. "Would you be so kind as to explain why?"

Mother Vauzou sniffed and sat up even straighter than before, throwing back her shoulders and tossing her head. "The ecclesiastical authorities prevailed upon Marie-Bernard to take the veil because they could not allow her to remain in

the world," she replied. "They were afraid that she might embarrass the Church. Their fears, I must say, were well founded, given her nature and her family background. Unfortunately, because of the fame attached to her by the apparitions, once she had completed her novitiate, we had nowhere to send her where she would not have been a curiosity, a carnival sideshow, a freak. All the Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction who served their novitiate at Saint-Gildard received assignments elsewhere; none stayed on to live at the Mother House. Only Marie-Bernard."

"But surely you cannot blame her for that, madame!" the Benedictine protested. "She was, as it were, a prisoner of her own fame."

"An undeserved fame!" Mother Vauzou cried. "Marie-Bernard Soubirous was an ordinary scullery nun, monsieur, fit for scraping carrots and scrubbing floors and little else. She was vain and stupid and stubborn and sly and common."

"Nevertheless, the Mother of God chose her—" the Benedictine began.

The nun cut him off. "Nonsense! Oh, Marie-Bernard saw something. I will admit to that. She saw *something*. Just what it was I am not prepared to say."

"But bishops believed her," the Benedictine pointed out. "The pontifical curia ..."

"I am not denying that *others* believed her," Mother Vauzou clarified. "She took so many people in right from the start, and they could not be dissuaded. Nor can they be dissuaded now, apparently. What I am saying is that *I* didn't believe her."

THIRD IDENTIFICATION OF THE BODY

APRIL 18, 1925

"Now, what is it that you would like?" Dr. Comte said, turning to the Bishop of Nevers with the air of a guest at the table who has been asked to carve.

"Whatever you can manage without making too much of a mess," the bishop replied. "In these matters one can rarely afford to be too picky. A few ribs should do nicely, eh, Mother Forestier?"

"We would prefer that the Venerable's heart remain in her body," the mother superior told the surgeon. "Apart from that, anything that can be covered up by her habit would be fine." She turned to the bishop. "Did I tell you? Given the remarkable condition of the Venerable's body, we have decided to display her."

"In a glass coffin?" the bishop asked.

"A crystal-and-gilt reliquary, actually," the mother superior replied. "The Armand Caillat Cateland workshop, in Lyons, does beautiful work. We have already placed the order."

"A splendid idea!" the bishop exclaimed.

"I say, Talon, the trunk is slightly supported on the left arm," Dr. Comte pointed out. "Might be a bit tricky to go in there without doing noticeable damage."

"Right you are," his colleague replied. "We'll start with the other side, then. Scalpel, Sister Clémence, please!"

TESTIMONY OF MOTHER MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAUZOU

FEBRUARY 2, 1899

"It seems to me, Mother Vauzou ... if you don't mind my saying so ... that you are displaying a prideful nature in insisting that you are right about Sister Marie-Bernard whereas so many eminent ecclesiastics—men better equipped than you to judge these matters, I might add—are wrong." This old harridan with the twitching cheek was beginning to try the Benedictine's patience. "Not to mention the thousands of devout Catholics who champion her cause!"

"Eminent ecclesiastics! Devout Catholics!" Mother Vauzou snorted. "I suppose you're referring to those countless bishops and cardinals, not to mention wealthy ladies, who would convene in the parlor to hear Marie-Bernard's account of the apparitions and, in the course of conversation, casually drop a handkerchief in the hopes that she might pick it up and so transform it into a holy object!" She laughed. "Not that she enjoyed talking about the apparitions, mind you! 'Do I have to tell the story again?' she would complain petulantly. 'How tiresome!' Or, sulking and turning away, 'I'm sorry, Mother, but I forget.' As if anyone could forget one moment of an encounter with Our Lady! That was when I began to suspect her."

"So she did not vaunt herself on account of the apparitions?" the Benedictine said, writing this down. "Some people would relish the attention."

"Not Marie-Bernard!" Mother Vauzou shook her head. "She was a secretive little thing. You recall that the Holy Mother was supposed to have given her messages?"

"I do."

"She wouldn't tell me what they were!" Mother Vauzou was indignant. "You must tell me what the Queen of Heaven said; I'd tell her."

"No," she'd reply, shaking her head. "They were secrets."

"But I am the mistress of novices; I would remind her. 'You cannot have any secrets from me!'"

"*Aquerò* said, 'Tell no one!'" She always referred to the Virgin Mother as *Aquerò*—a pronoun in her native langue d'oc, best translated as "That one there." I thought it very disrespectful!

"But what about the Pope?" I would counter. "Would you not tell His Holiness if he asked you?"

"Certainly not!" she would reply. "My secrets have nothing to do with him either. You see how bold she was? How insolent? Why it was necessary to ... do as I did?"

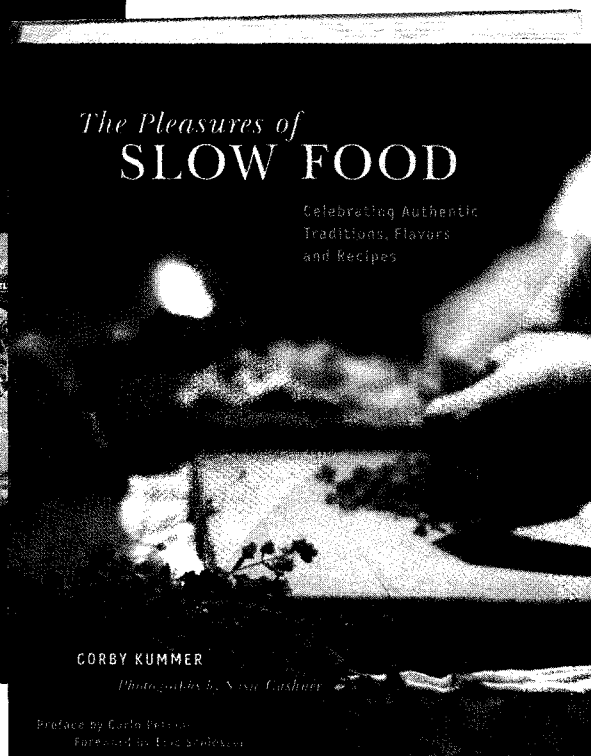
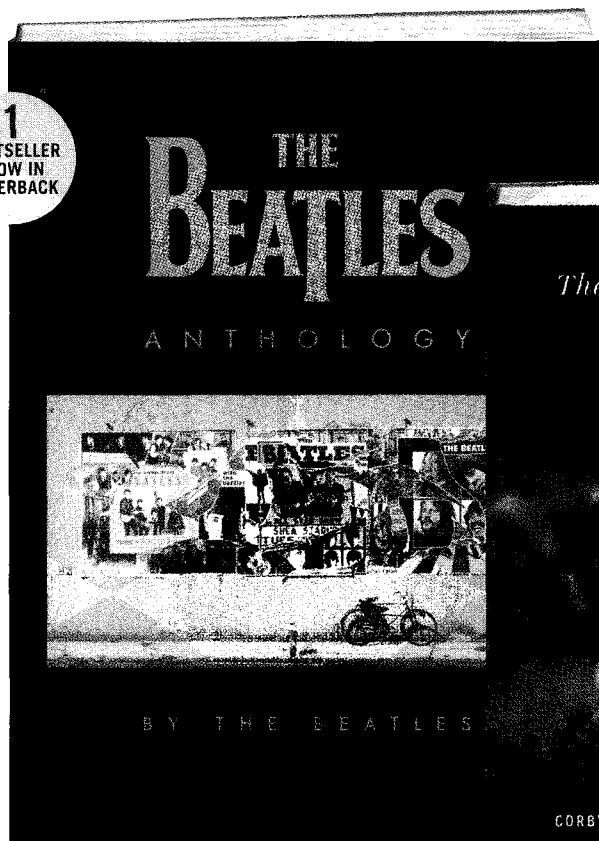
THIRD IDENTIFICATION OF THE BODY

APRIL 18, 1925

Carefully the surgeon made an incision in the right side of Bernadette Soubirous's thorax and detached and then removed the rear section of the fifth and sixth right ribs. He handed these to Sister Clémence, the convent's infirmarian, who promptly dropped them on the slate floor.

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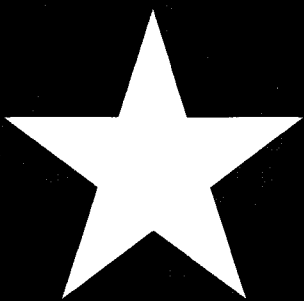
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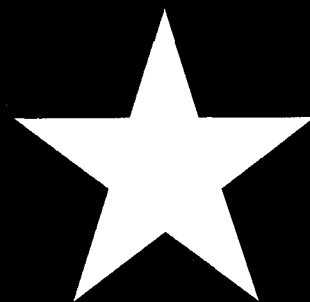


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"Mother of God!" Sister Clémence cried out in a strangled voice.

"What?" Dr. Comte asked.

"They're warm!" she declared.

"That is impossible!" the doctor countered.

"Sister Clémence!" The mother superior took charge of the situation. "Get ahold of yourself!" Stooping, she picked up the two pieces of rib and popped them into the basin of holy water designated for that purpose. "You are overwrought," she told the infirmarian. "The holy relics are not in the least warm. Indeed, they are cold." She handed Sister Clémence a towel of white linen. "Now dry them off and place them on the silver tray."

But Sister Clémence burst into noisy tears. "I felt the dear saint's life tremble in her bones!" she sputtered. "I assure you, Mother Forestier, they were quite warm! Oh, thanks be to our Holy Mother in Heaven! Blessed Bernadette!" In the end she had to be led, gulping and hysterical, from the chapel. Poor Sister Philomène, her assistant, reluctantly took her place.

TESTIMONY OF
MOTHER MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAUZOU
FEBRUARY 2, 1899

"To do as you did ... ?" the Benedictine repeated, feigning ignorance.

"Oh, don't tell me you haven't heard the rumors!" Mother Vauzou scoffed. "Read the reports! It was all over the newspapers at the time. The convent's physician told a journalist that the years of scrubbing stone floors on her hands and knees had given rise to that grotesque tumor on her right knee, which contributed to her eventual demise. He implied that I was somehow to blame ... that I had worked Marie-Bernard too hard, given the ever fragile state of her health. Of course, the mother superior promptly dismissed him, but the harm was done."

"Let me assure you ...," the Benedictine began.

Mother Vauzou cut him short. "You will no doubt be surprised to hear that I concede his point. I was too hard on Marie-Bernard. I was *obviously* too hard on the wretched girl. She died, didn't she?"

"I'm sure you didn't mean ...," The Benedictine faltered.

"However," the elderly nun said, "*nonetheless*, I must remind the episcopal commission that it was my job to humble Marie-Bernard. The Mother of Our Lord was supposed to have elected to appear to her. That she would be proud of this fact would be inevitable, and pride, as you have so recently pointed out, is the devil's own snare. Then, too, I had the other nuns in my charge to think of. We could not have them venerating Marie-Bernard and so putting their own mortal souls in peril."

"Still ..." The Benedictine consulted his notes. "She was quite ill. Asthma that became, over time, chronic, not to mention chest pains and shortness of breath. Then there

was that aneurysm she had and, of course, the bone decay."

"Yes! Yes!" Mother Vauzou admitted. "No need to go on and on about it! She was a veritable bundle of infirmities! She was forever hawking up blood. Basin after basin of it. One would never have thought she had so much in her. However, I still maintain that receiving extreme unction four times in one lifetime is excessive."

THIRD IDENTIFICATION OF THE BODY

APRIL 18, 1925

"What have we here?" Dr. Comte said, poking around in the opening in Bernadette's thorax with his thumb.

"Let's have a look!" Dr. Talon suggested, moving alongside his colleague and bending over the body. "Offhand I would say that that would be the liver, covered by the diaphragm."

"Excellent!" Dr. Comte replied. "Let's take a sliver!" Carefully he removed a piece of the diaphragm and cut into the liver below. "*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed softly.

"What?" the bishop asked.

"The liver is still ... viable!" Dr. Comte replied. "Observe!" Straightening up, he dangled a slice of the organ from his forceps. "The liver," he explained to the assembled witnesses, "is a soft organ and inclined to crumble. Normally it decomposes very rapidly, or else hardens to a chalky consistency. That it should be so well preserved in this case is ... well, wouldn't you agree with me, Talon, that it might be called preternatural?"

"Indeed!" Dr. Talon said, nodding gravely. "Preternatural!"

"A viable liver! Our Bernadette is blessed indeed!" the bishop cried, while the nuns fluttered and made sounds like those of birds when a gentle spring rain commences.

TESTIMONY OF
MOTHER MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAUZOU
FEBRUARY 2, 1899

"So, in brief, you feel that Marie-Bernard did not exhibit the attributes of a saint as you understand them, and you question the authenticity of the apparitions. Is that correct?"

"That is correct," Mother Vauzou replied.

The Benedictine closed his notebook and started to rise. "Well, Mother Vauzou, this has been most enlightening ..."

"That is not to say that she didn't have a way about her," Mother Vauzou said hastily, as if seeking to detain him.

"What do you mean?" the Benedictine asked.

"She drew people to her," Mother Vauzou explained. "She had, for lack of a better word, a sort of charisma."

"Charisma?" the Benedictine repeated.

"And, of course, she was ... I suppose you might say fetching."

"I don't grasp your meaning," the Benedictine said.

"Attractive," the nun said. "She was very attractive."

"I have seen photographs," the Benedictine said.

"Well, they do not do her justice." The old nun's expression softened momentarily, becoming almost wistful. "Marie-Bernard had a certain otherworldly quality that became even more pronounced over time," she continued, but in a gentler tone. "Even when she came to us, a fresh-faced girl and, if the truth be told, too much like a dumpling for my taste, something about her eyes was compelling." Mother Vauzou paused, remembering. Then she glanced away and said hurriedly, "Prolonged illness greatly refined her beauty even as it rendered her poor body grotesque. By the end she was ... quite inexplicably lovely. Transfigured, you might say."

"You did not hate her so much as you pretend," the Benedictine said, guessing.

"On the contrary!" the former mistress of novices confessed in a constricted voice. "I loved her as I have loved no other human being. I loved her, to my great shame, more than I loved the Bridegroom! She had seen God, you see—just not yours and mine!"

A single tear inched its way through the labyrinth of wrinkles that was the old nun's ruined face, while her right cheek vibrated like the plucked string of a standing bass.

THE BEATIFICATION OF BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS SPRING 1925

Once the relics had been removed from Bernadette's thorax, everyone left the chapel with the exception of the handful of Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction upon whom the mother superior had bestowed the signal honor of assisting in the preparation of the body of the soon to be Blessed Bernadette Soubirous. On Mother Forestier's instructions they swathed Marie-Bernard with bandages, leaving only her hands and face uncovered, and replaced her in her coffin. Then the mother superior sent Sister Clémence to fetch a Monsieur Bourgeot to the chapel. He was from the firm of Pierre Imans, a mannequin manufacturer in Paris, and had been waiting in her parlor.

"Although you will see that Sister Marie-Bernard's body is perfectly mummified," she told him, "you can't help noting a somewhat blackish tinge to her face and hands and a rather sunken quality to her nose and eyes. As we have decided to display her to the public, we are naturally concerned that these slight imperfections might distress our visitors. That is the reason we have approached your firm."

"You have done the right thing," Monsieur Bourgeot said. "We French are not like the Italians, who insist on displaying their saints regardless of how hideous they appear. Have you ever seen Santa Chiara, madame, in Assisi? Black as an Ethiope! Very unbecoming!"

He then proceeded to make a precise imprint of the Seer's face and hands, from which to fashion a light wax mask and a set of paraffin gloves.

"I have some photographs for you as well," the mother

superior said, handing the artisan a packet. "They should assist you in perfecting the likeness."

"Trust Pierre Imans, madame!" Monsieur Bourgeot said. "The Blessed Bernadette will look as beautiful in death as in life, and no one shall suspect a thing!"

The coffin was transferred to the Chapel of Saint-Helen (which was more easily sealed off not only from the curious public but also from the other nuns, whose devotion to Marie-Bernard might distract them from other obligations) and was left open until such time as the firm of Armand Caillat Cateland had finished the crystal-and-gilt reliquary. "I want these doors locked and sealed until the Pope has proclaimed our Marie-Bernard blessed," Mother Forestier instructed the sacristan.

For the next three months the body of Bernadette, tightly bound in bandages, lay alone in the shadowy chapel, listening to the prayers of nuns who knelt, whispering, beyond the padlocked doors.

BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS SPRING 1925

"Are they all gone, *Aquerò*? Such a noise they make, and so much fuss! The little Forestier ... she was just beginning her novitiate when the doctor said, 'It's the White Chapel for you, my girl!' and off to the infirmary I went for the last time. Do you remember my White Chapel, *Aquerò*? That's what I used to call my little bed in the infirmary, with its white curtains. So pretty! I must say Forestier looks rather the worse for wear. Was her chin always that long? But she was never good-looking. Not like me, *Aquerò*. Not like you.

"I can't say I was very happy when that fellow with the goatee cut me open. 'Like slicing beef jerky!' he muttered under his breath to that other monsieur, the stout one with the pince-nez. He should try being dead for forty-six years! And his breath smelled of whiskey and garlic.

"Hmm ...

"So this is what you meant when you said I would be immortal. Put in a glass case for all to see, like the Star of India, or Snow White. And apparently I will look my best. I have to say I'm pleased about that. How angry horrid old Mother Vauzou was when I wouldn't tell her my secret. But really, now, when you think of it, how could I? You told me not to, and you are much, much more powerful than Mother Vauzou. Besides, if I had told the old terror, she would only have beaten me some more for being too proud. She was strange. Sometimes I'd catch her looking at me, just staring—with the most peculiar expression on her face, as though I were something in a store window that she wanted to buy but couldn't afford.

"I wonder if poor Raoul, who wanted so to marry me, is still alive. If he is, he must be a very old man ... eighty-five at least. Perhaps he will come to see me from Nantes. How I would enjoy that!

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28	10.50	9.41	15.75	13.56	26.25	21.88
29	10.50	9.41	15.75	13.56	26.25	21.88
30	10.50	9.41	15.75	13.56	26.25	21.88
31	10.50	9.41	15.75	13.56	26.25	21.88
32	10.50	9.41	15.75	13.56	26.25	21.88
33	10.50	9.41	15.75	13.56	26.25	21.88
34	10.50	9.41	15.75	13.56	26.25	21.88
35	10.50	9.41	15.75	13.56	26.25	21.88
36	10.72	9.84	16.19	14.44	27.13	22.75
37	10.94	10.28	16.63	15.31	28.00	24.50
38	11.59	10.72	17.94	16.19	30.63	25.38
39	12.25	11.16	19.25	17.06	32.38	27.13
40	12.69	11.38	20.13	17.50	35.00	28.88
41	13.78	12.47	22.31	19.69	38.50	30.63
42	15.09	13.56	24.94	21.88	42.88	35.88
43	16.41	14.66	27.56	24.06	48.13	39.38
44	17.50	15.31	29.75	25.38	52.50	42.88
45	19.25	16.41	33.25	27.56	59.50	48.13
46	20.56	17.28	35.88	29.31	64.75	50.75
47	22.53	18.38	39.81	31.50	71.75	55.13
48	24.28	19.47	43.31	33.69	77.88	59.50
49	26.69	20.56	48.13	35.88	85.75	64.75
50	28.44	21.88	51.63	38.50	94.50	70.00
51	30.63	23.19	56.00	41.13	103.25	75.25
52	33.25	25.38	61.25	45.50	116.38	83.13

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54	40.03	29.31	74.81	53.38	140.88	98.00
55	44.19	31.72	83.13	58.19	156.63	107.63
56	48.13	33.91	91.00	62.56	171.50	114.63
57	53.59	36.97	101.94	68.69	192.50	125.13
58	59.06	40.03	112.88	74.81	213.50	135.63
59	64.53	43.09	123.81	80.94	234.50	146.13
60	71.09	47.03	136.94	88.81	259.88	158.38
61	78.09	50.75	150.94	96.25	287.00	174.13
62	86.84	55.78	168.44	106.31	322.88	194.25
63	95.81	60.59	186.38	115.94	357.88	215.25
64	105.00	66.50	204.75	127.75	393.75	235.38
65	116.16	71.53	227.06	137.81	437.50	261.63
66	128.41	77.22	251.56	149.19	469.88	280.88
67	144.59	84.44	283.94	163.63	514.50	307.13
68	161.00	92.09	316.75	178.94	559.13	333.38
69	177.41	99.75	349.56	194.25	602.88	359.63
70	197.97	109.16	390.69	213.06	658.88	392.88
71	225.75	131.03	446.25	256.81	869.75	490.00
72	262.50	160.56	519.75	315.88	1017.63	604.63
73	299.69	190.09	594.13	374.94	1166.38	718.38
74	336.88	219.63	668.50	434.00	1315.13	832.13
75	383.25	256.38	761.25	507.50	1501.50	974.75
76	436.84	296.84	868.44	588.44	1713.25	1131.38
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"*Aquerò? Aquerò?* You are still here, aren't you? Oh, good! I am so glad. Locked away in that vault all by myself. It was dark and cold and so tedious. To tell the truth, I thought you were never coming. Not that I doubted your promise. No, not for an instant!

"Do you think you could come a little closer? I cannot move my head, you see. So many years have passed since Massabielle, and I have missed you very much.

"Ah, there you are! You are as beautiful as I remember. So much more beautiful than they imagined. I know you were disappointed with the statue at Lourdes, but the sculptor insisted on making you look like Mary, though you are so much more beautiful. But they had it in their heads, you know. 'It's the Mother of God you saw!' they'd insist. 'Why, it must be!' And they believed it. Yet I never said so, *Aquerò*. I never used her name, only that which belonged to you. I was faithful all those years, in spite of everything.

"And now they will call me blessed and venerate me, and I will have a shrine like those that my friends and I used to build for you out of stones back in Lourdes every May—only much grander, apparently. Miraculous cures will be attributed to me and people will implore me to intercede on their behalf with God. Little do they know I am your handmaiden and yours alone, *Aquerò*. Beautiful, terrible Goddess."

THE ENSHRINEMENT OF THE BLESSED BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS

JULY 18, 1925

On June 14, 1925, Pope Pius XI signed the official edict: the Venerable Bernadette, now the Blessed Bernadette, was launched on the road to sainthood, which she would attain, finally, in 1933.

However, delays occurred at the firm of Armand Caillat Cateland; not until the first week of July did the gilt-encrusted crystal reliquary in which Marie-Bernard's body was to be displayed arrive on the train. It was then carted to the novices' hall in the Convent of Saint-Gildard, where it was lovingly unpacked and polished.

On July 18 the body of Bernadette Soubirous, clothed in a new habit and outfitted with the wax mask and gloves made for her in Paris by the firm of Pierre Imans, was borne to the Hall of Novices on a white stretcher. Following the chant for the Office of the Virgins, the body was, with great gentleness born of reverence, placed in the reliquary. On August 3 it was transferred to its permanent position in the beautiful principal chapel of the Convent of Saint-Gildard, where it is on view to this day. ▀

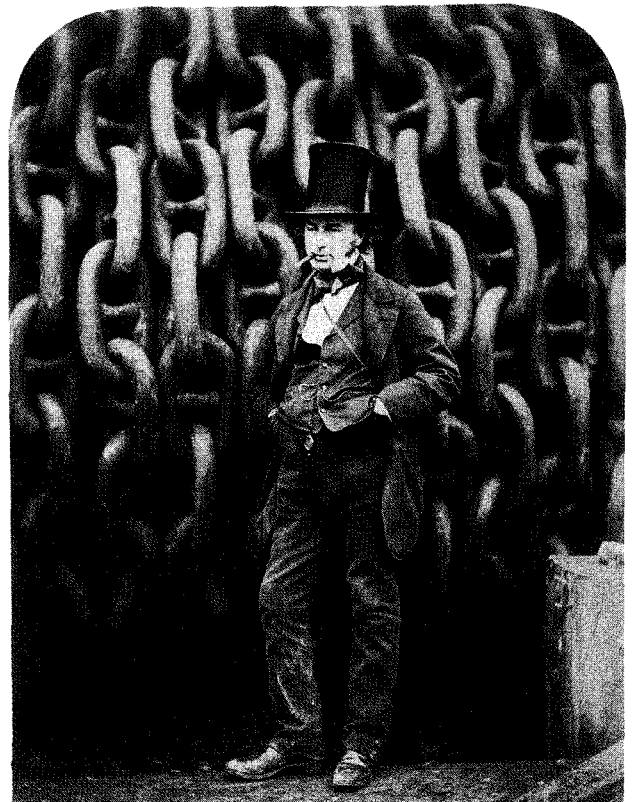
Melissa Hardy is the author of the novel A Cry of Bees (1970) and two short-story collections, Constant Fire (1995) and The Uncharted Heart (2001). She has been awarded the Canadian Authors Association's Silver Jubilee Award.

THE LAUNCHING CHAINS OF THE GREAT EASTERN

(by Robert Howlett, 1857)

A waterfall of black chains
looms behind the man in the stovepipe hat.
Cigar. Wrinkled clothes. This is
Isambard Kingdom Brunel.
Who could not stop working. Slept
and ate at the shipyard.
The largest ship in the world.
Driven to outdo himself.
Fashioned from iron plate and
powered by three separate means.
Able to sail to Ceylon and back
without refueling. Fated
to lay the Atlantic cable, the India cable.
Untouched in size for forty years.
The Great Leviathan. The Little Giant,
Isambard Kingdom Brunel.
Builder of tunnels, ships, railroads, bridges.
Engineer and Genius of England.
He should have built churches, you know.
Everything he prayed for came true.

—JOHN SPAULDING

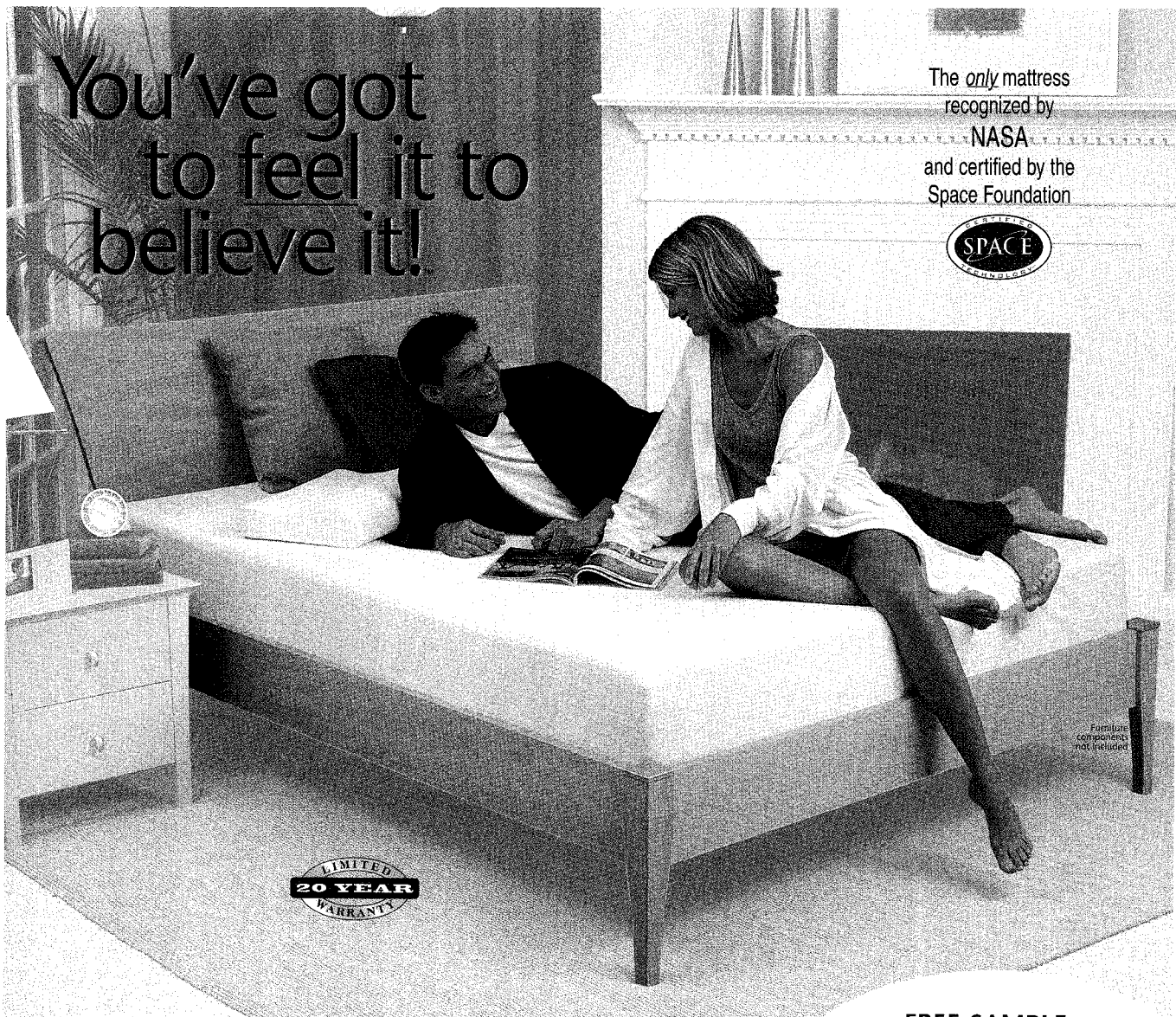


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John Spaulding's poems have appeared in numerous periodicals, including Poetry and The Iowa Review. Walking in Stone (1989) is his most recent collection of poems.

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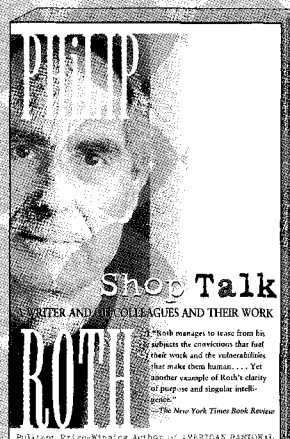
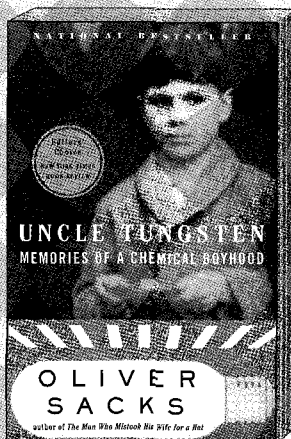
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"A rare gem.... A joyous, wistful, generous and tough-minded memoir."
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SHOP TALK Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Pastoral*

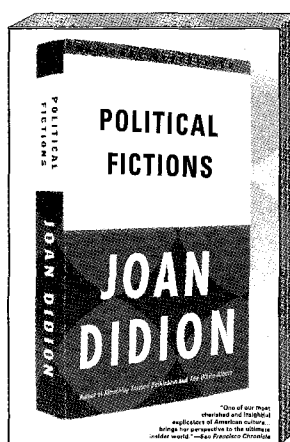
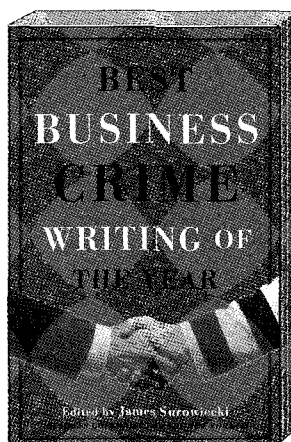
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—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

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An Anchor Books Original

From *The New Yorker's* widely acclaimed business columnist comes a timely collection of journalism devoted to American capitalism's ongoing managerial mayhem. A report from the frontlines by some of America's most talented and perceptive writers, from P. J. O'Rourke on Enron to Marc Peyser on Martha Stewart.



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—*The New York Times Book Review*

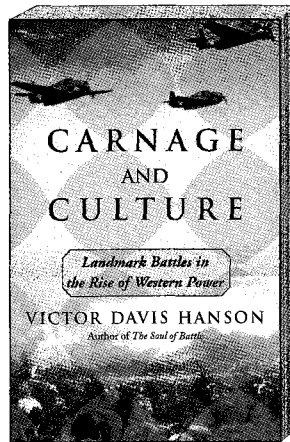
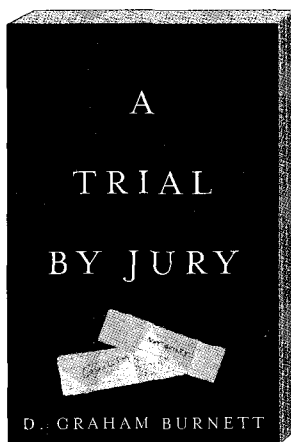
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—*The Washington Post Book World*

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"A graceful, economical writer, with a sharp eye for detail and a nuanced feel for character."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Burnett manages to paint vivid portraits of his fellow-jurors and examine the knottier issues of class, race, and gender that complicate the justice system's search for objective truth."
—*The New Yorker*



CARNAGE AND CULTURE

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—*National Review*

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BOOKS & CRITICS

THIS MONTH:

The Sage of Baltimore

Jonathan Yardley enjoys *The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken*, a new biography by Terry Teachout
PAGE 129

A Nine-Hour Resurrection

Christopher Hitchens looks to Tom Stoppard's *The Coast of Utopia* to rescue Alexander Herzen, the author of *My Past and Thoughts*, from oblivion
PAGE 141

Concrete Expressionism

Seek My Face, by John Updike, reviewed by Christina Schwarz
PAGE 147

Sociopath on a String

The Adventures of Pinocchio: Story of a Puppet, by Carlo Collodi, reviewed by James Marcus
PAGE 147

Panhandle

That Old Ace in the Hole, by Annie Proulx, reviewed by Barbara Hoffert
PAGE 148

Walking Tour of the Vanished

What I Saw: Reports From Berlin, 1920-1933, by Joseph Roth, reviewed by Katherine A. Powers
PAGE 149

Hothouse Flowers

Why There Are No Good Men Left, by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, reviewed by Caitlin Flanagan
PAGE 150

Coming of Age on Long Island

The novelist Mona Simpson appreciates a departure from the norm in Alice McDermott's new novel, *Child of My Heart*
PAGE 153

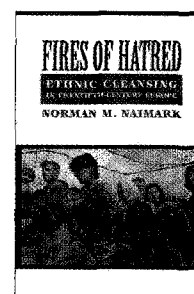
NEW & NOTEWORTHY

What to read this month

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

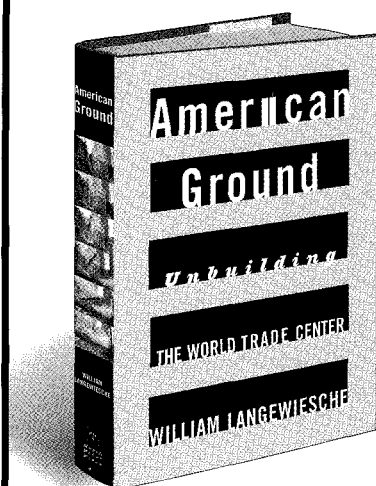
.....

Revealing, often in spite of itself, this study, originally published last year, deserves a wider readership, and might get it thanks to this recently issued paperback edition. A lot is wrong with the book: in an ostensibly objective examination of five cases of ethnic cleansing in twentieth-century Europe, Naimark inserts his indignant demand that in future cases "the international community" (whatever that is) must "act promptly and decisively." He ought to separate his history from his policy advocacy: such sloganeering in what should be a dispassionate analysis leads him to ignore all the hard questions that would perforce confront those policymakers whom Naimark rather jejunely expects to "act." (These questions are, of course, all the harder after last September 11, when it became clear that at least some of America's national-security resources must be devoted to countering real and present dangers.) But Naimark's book is significant because it contains the most easily accessible detailed account of the worst instance of ethnic cleansing in postwar Europe: the expulsion of about 11.5 million ethnic Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia after World War II, which claimed the lives of as many as 2.5 million. In his thorough case study Naimark unwittingly demolishes much of his book's overarching thesis. He subscribes to what could be called the Very Bad Man theory of ethnic cleansing, embraced by human-rights activists and many academics, which holds that only the unsophisticated would consider ethnic cleansing the product of what he derisively caricatures as "ancient hatreds." Rather, Naimark asserts, it is "ignited by the warped ambitions of modern politicians." But, as Naimark points out, the campaigns of ethnic cleansing in Czechoslovakia and Poland were presided over by democratic regimes (in Czechoslovakia the mild-mannered, impeccably liberal Edvard Benes was the head of state), supported by all the major political parties, and even endorsed by the United States and Britain. In his introduction Naimark singles Poland out as one of the "few success stories" in formerly communist Europe, and he would presumably include the Czech Republic as another. But he ignores an obvious if unsettling question: Are those states today stable, prosperous, and democratic largely because of their brutal removal of their former German minorities?



FIRES OF HATRED
by Norman M. Naimark
Harvard

The landmark
Atlantic Monthly series
everyone is talking about



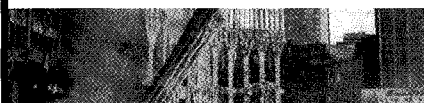
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uplifting pieces of writing
you are likely ever to read."**

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of journalism, full of
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thousand maudlin tributes."**

—Boris Kachka, *New York*



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FILM STUDIES

I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING!, by Pam Cook (BFI Publishing/California). A recent addition to the BFI Film Classics series, in which landmark works of cinema are treated to graceful and precise analyses (such as the one Salman Rushdie gave *The Wizard of Oz*), this elegant exegesis of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1945 movie *I Know Where I'm Going!* illuminates one of the most shimmeringly intense films ever made. Starring Wendy Hiller, who managed to be simultaneously winsome and knowing, the movie itself is so haunting largely because of its oppositions. Jaunty yet deeply romantic, playful yet elegiac, it maintains an ironic tone (thanks in part to its many visual and auditory puns) even as it depicts its protagonist losing her jaded self to True Love. Above all, the film juxtaposes a simple romance with an exploration of the dark, even violent, nature of sexual desire. Cook puts the movie in a wide perspective—assessing the astonishing partnership of Powell and Pressburger (they shared directing, producing, and writing credits), the ways in which wartime attitudes toward marriage influenced the story, and the depopulation of Scotland's western islands, where the movie was set and largely filmed. Superbly selected still photos (the book's best attribute) inform Cook's discerning analysis of the movie's most striking feature: the cinematography of Erwin Hillier, which is—as suits a film dominated by juxtaposition—characterized by the interplay of light and shadow.

HISTORY

AMERICA'S GOD, by Mark A. Noll (Oxford). A comprehensive history of American Christian theology and its social context from the Revolution to the Civil War, this book is exasperating because it is at once important and impenetrable. Over the past thirty years an unusually creative body of scholarship has explored a crucial question concerning antebellum society, culture, and politics: How is it that although nearly none of the Founding Fathers had subscribed to traditional Christianity, and although the churches had suffered an enormous decline by

the end of the eighteenth century, evangelical Protestantism had by the 1830s so permeated America that Tocqueville would correctly call this country "the place in the world where the Christian religion has most preserved genuine powers over souls"? No historian is more qualified than Noll to synthesize this scholarly work. Focusing specifically on the complex relationship between evangelicalism and republican political ideology, and on the central role that evangelical theology played in both the defense and the condemnation of slavery, Noll has an astounding command of the vast literature, and his understanding of the ways in which evangelicalism influenced the values, institutions, ideology, and self-conception of the new nation is always intricate and often astute. Given his subject, Noll can't be faulted for the denseness of this 602-page work, but his arguments are often imprecise and riddled with the jargon of the academy ("outworking," "construct," and, inevitably, "discourse" infect its pages). Although this is almost certainly the most significant work of American historical scholarship this year, too many readers will justifiably shy away from it.

THE BATTLE FOR LENINGRAD, 1941–1944, by David M. Glantz (Kansas). The clash between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army was the largest and most ferocious war in history. The main scene of the Nazis' defeat, the Eastern Front claimed 88 percent of all German casualties in the Second World War, and the death of as many as 35 million Soviet civilians and 14.7 million Soviet soldiers. The armies struggled over vast territory, in a seemingly unrelenting series of battles of unprecedented scope: in a single battle, at Kursk (the largest in history), at least 1.5 million Soviets and Germans fought. The Red Army's 1944 Operation Bagration, a stunning sequence of multi-front strategic offensives, remains a feat unmatched in the history of warfare. In short, the Russo-German war constitutes the most important chapter in world military history. Astonishingly, however, the number of authoritative books in English on any aspect of the Soviets' "Great Patriotic War" can be counted on two hands. They include John Erickson's

sweeping two-volume history (*The Road to Stalingrad* and *The Road to Berlin*), and the more recent works by the editor of the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, retired U.S. Army Colonel David M. Glantz, now indisputably the West's foremost expert on the subject. Glantz is fully exploiting perhaps the most significant development ever in military historical scholarship—the opening of the enormous Soviet archives. He has already written a masterly general operational history of the Eastern Front, and a huge and detailed account of the Battle of Kursk, along with other studies. This more than 600-page book meticulously chronicles the operational history of the Battle of Leningrad—the nearly three-year German siege of the city, and the Soviets' often disastrous attempts to lift it—which cost the USSR close to two million civilians and soldiers. Glantz is a sober scholar and a painstaking researcher. His books are definitive, though very heavy going. They will be an essential resource when the epic struggle in the East finally finds its Tacitus or its Parkman.

GOD'S PLAYGROUND, by Norman Davies (Columbia). What makes this two-volume history of Poland, first published in 1979, such a great book? This edition, available in the new year, will be the standard work on the subject in English, but it's much more than a reliable chronicle. Davies, a University of London professor and the author of the quirky, sparkling, and gigantic *Europe: A History*, writes with commanding dexterity and a confident, at times almost swaggering, intelligence as he balances narrative and analysis. (Between his chronological chapters he intersperses lengthy thematic essays on, for example, "The Vicissitudes of Urban Life," the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, and "The Modern Polish Frontiers"; this last, which he elucidates with ease, is a topic as controversial and convoluted as it is vital to understanding twentieth-century European diplomatic and military history.) Davies is opinionated and biased (he could be characterized as a Polophile), and he argues cogently—if not, for me, convincingly—for the most charitable interpretation possible concerning such subjects as

the Polish government's policies toward Jews in the interwar period, and its ethnic cleansing of Germans and Ukrainians after the war. Given Davies's bias, it's an impressive mark of his scholarly honesty and comprehensiveness that both times I've read his book it has led me to a conclusion its brilliant author would find uncongenial. A.J.P. Taylor's remark about the Germans applies equally to the Poles: "[They] have never found a middle way of life, either in their thought or least of all in their politics. One looks in vain in their history for *juste milieu*, for common sense."

ARCHITECTURE AND TOWN PLANNING IN COLONIAL NORTH AMERICA, by James D. Kornwolf (Johns Hopkins). A monument of scholarly publishing, this three-volume, 1,823-double-column-page work is the first thorough history of its subject. It ranges from Russian Alaska to French Quebec, Michigan, Missouri,

and Louisiana; from Spanish New Mexico, California, and Florida to the British and Dutch cities and settlements on the Atlantic seaboard. Comprehensive and detailed, it examines—in unusually brisk and intelligent prose, and with almost 4,000 aptly chosen illustrations—the public and private buildings; the forts and harbors; the squares and greens; the streets, towns, and cities; and the gardens and landscapes of the New World. Throughout, Kornwolf calls attention both to the ways all these things fit into general patterns and to their flourishes and idiosyncrasies. A remarkable work of both art history and social history, these volumes keenly assess the aesthetic triumphs of town planning and landscape design in Philadelphia, Charleston, and Williamsburg, and the architectural feats performed by the housewrights and bridge builders of Essex County, Massachusetts—but they also reveal how structures

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Suggestions for Giving and Getting

NONFICTION

CHARLES DARWIN: THE POWER OF PLACE

by Janet Browne (Knopf)

MASTER OF THE SENATE

by Robert A. Caro (Knopf)

DOSTOEVSKY: THE MANTLE OF THE PROPHET, by Joseph Frank (Princeton)

THE NEW BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF FILM, by David Thomson (Knopf)

SAMUEL PEPYS: THE UNEQUALLED SELF

by Claire Tomalin (Knopf)

FICTION

ACHILLES, by Elizabeth Cook (Picador USA)

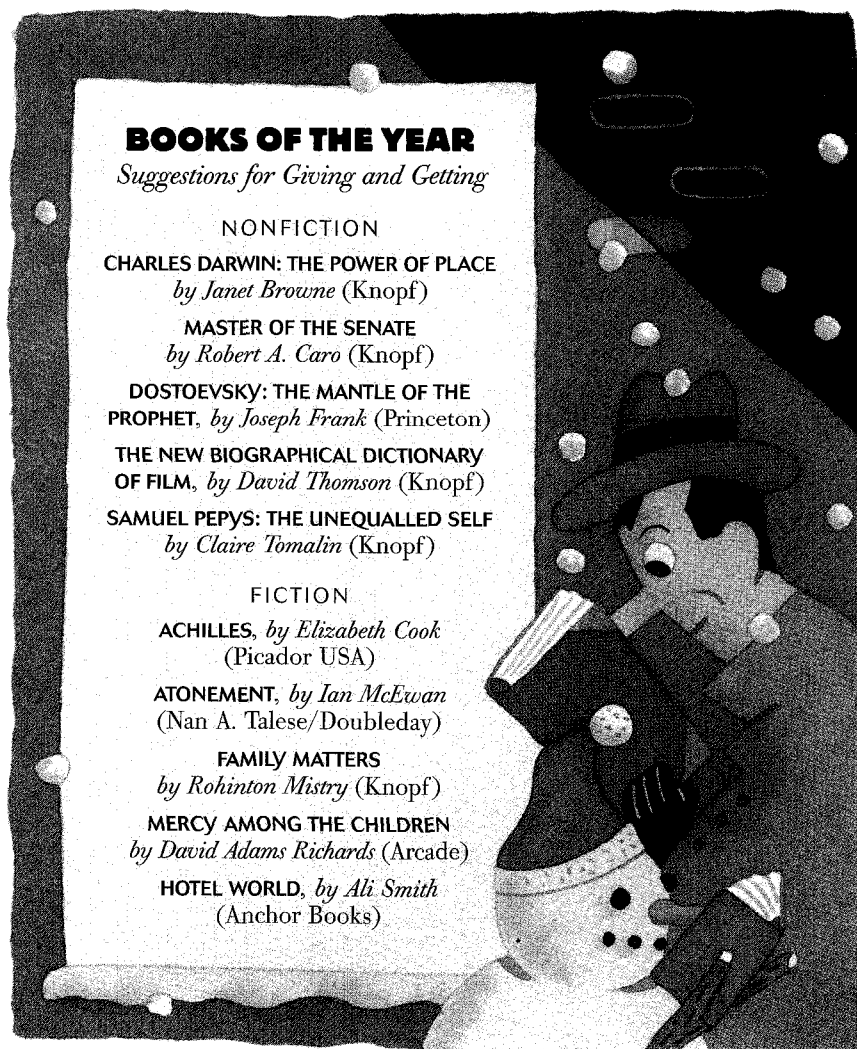
ATONEMENT, by Ian McEwan (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday)

FAMILY MATTERS

by Rohinton Mistry (Knopf)

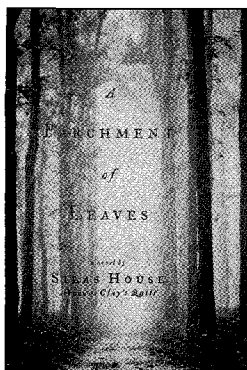
MERCY AMONG THE CHILDREN by David Adams Richards (Arcade)

HOTEL WORLD, by Ali Smith (Anchor Books)



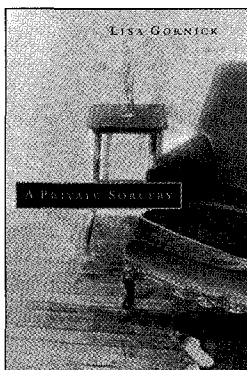
THIS IS ALGONQUIN

SILAS HOUSE



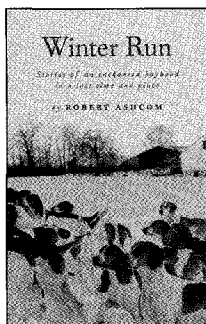
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LISA GORNICK



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ROBERT ASHCOM



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and designs reflected North America's disparate cultural, environmental, and religious characteristics. (Divergences in building traditions between New England and the South, for instance, already firmly established in 1700, embodied the differences in class structure, mortality rates, and family relations between the two regions.) Thank God for university presses; these beautiful books are of lasting importance, but no publishing house with responsibilities to shareholders could take on such a time-consuming, expensive, and unremunerative project.

THE LAST DAYS OF HITLER, by Hugh Trevor-Roper (Macmillan UK/Trafalgar Square). Yes, yes, I'm sorry—another book about the Second World War. But everyone should read this half-century-old masterpiece of historical literature, and now its final, seventh edition, published in Britain in 1995, is at last available here. The author, who would become a historian of seventeenth-century England, was a British intelligence officer assigned the task in September 1945 of determining what, precisely, had happened to Hitler. (In the immediate aftermath of the war many versions of the Führer's death or escape had become current.) Trevor-Roper's report and this book, which grew out of it, were based on his deft and meticulous analysis of captured German papers and diaries and above all on his incisive investigation and interrogation of often unreliable witnesses. From this fragmentary and contradictory evidence he fashioned a compelling narrative that remains definitive in its essentials. For this alone the book would be a triumph. But from his first chapter, with its brilliant collection of pen portraits of the members of Hitler's court, which he used to limn Nazism's history and aims, through his analysis of the intricate ramifications of the failed plot to kill Hitler in 1944, to his vivid evocation of the claustrophobic psychosis of the final days in the bunker beneath the Reich Chancellery, Trevor-Roper—with a sharp eye for ironic detail, a mordant sense of humor, and a cool, epigrammatic style—produced one of the most elegant and

penetrating works of modern history ever written.

BIOGRAPHY

FREDERICK THE GREAT, by David Fraser (Penguin UK/Trafalgar Square). Frederick II of Prussia was an autocrat of the Enlightenment: tolerant (he was generous to Prussia's Jews) and widely—astonishingly—accomplished. He wrote perceptively about history, diplomacy, military affairs, French literature, religion, philosophy, law, and government. He was a close friend and correspondent of Voltaire's. An excellent flutist, he composed three symphonies and seventy solo flute pieces. He was the most brilliant general and strategist of the eighteenth century. (After defeating Prussian armies at Jena and Auerstadt in 1806, Napoleon took his marshals to visit Frederick's tomb, in Potsdam. "Hats off, messieurs," he said. "If *he* were alive we would not be here.") He is among the three greatest German diplomats in history (the other two being Bismarck and Gustav Stresemann). He endured a brutal upbringing at the hands of his sadistic father (who forced him at the age of 18 to watch the beheading of his best friend, who had tried to help him escape to England), but he emerged a charming and witty, if somewhat aloof, adult. In short, Frederick is a great subject for a great biography. Nancy Mitford wrote a characteristically sparkling and superficial life of the King, but alas, Carlyle's wacky, idolatrous multi-volume biography seemed to have cast a pall over serious efforts in English—until now. Fraser, a retired British general and the biographer of Rommel, is especially trenchant on the potentially dull and complicated subjects of eighteenth-century warfare and Central European geostrategy, but he writes commandingly, and with panache and sensitivity, on all aspects of Frederick's life and multifaceted world. This magnificent biography was published in the United States last year, but its publisher soon went out of business, so the book has been frustratingly difficult to find. Happily, now Trafalgar Square is distributing the British paperback edition. **A**

Benjamin Schwarz is the literary editor of The Atlantic.

THE SAGE OF BALTIMORE

Reading the prose of H. L. Mencken is one of the great joys that literacy bestows on the sentient

BY JONATHAN YARDLEY

.....

Henry Louis Mencken was the wonder boy of American journalism. Born in Baltimore in 1880, he found employment as a reporter at its raffish *Herald* in 1899, became city editor when he was twenty-three, and two years later was made editor in chief.



When the *Herald* soon thereafter collapsed, he leaped nimbly to *The Sun* and remained there for most of the rest of his life, principally as its star columnist but in numerous advisory and managerial roles as well. Meantime, he edited two hugely influential national magazines, *The Smart Set* and *The American Mercury*, for which he wrote criticism that changed the American literary map, and, as Terry Teachout puts it,

In his spare time he produced *The American Language*, the pioneering study of the divergence of British and American English, which he saw through four editions and two supplementary volumes. He also launched three pulp magazines, wrote a best-selling autobiographical trilogy, edited a definitive anthology of his own writing, compiled a fat dictionary of quotations, translated Nietzsche's *Antichrist*, served as an unpaid literary consultant to Alfred Knopf, and dictated, by conservative estimate, a hundred thousand letters. Nor was his influence restricted to purely literary matters. As a working reporter and newspaper columnist, he covered everything from the Scopes evolution trial to the 1948 presidential conventions; as a popular philosopher, he produced a still-readable trilogy of "treatises" on democracy, comparative religion, and the history of ethics; as a social critic, he led the charge against the sterile pseudopuritanism of Prohibition-era American culture, an undertaking that his enemies on the left were quick to praise.

If the sin of self-quotation can be pardoned, this is how I described the young Mencken in my introduction to his



posthumously published journalistic memoir, *My Life as Author and Editor*: "He was a force of nature, brushing aside all objects animal and mineral in his headlong rush to the éclat that surely awaited him. He seized each day, shook it to within an inch of its life, then gaily went on to the next." By the time he was in his early forties, he had become what Walter Lippmann called "the most powerful personal influence on this whole generation of educated people." *The American Mercury*, which he and George Jean Nathan founded in 1924, had a relatively small circulation—it topped out in 1928 at about 84,000 copies—but a large readership, to the point that it seemed, Teachout writes, as if "everyone in the country was either reading the *Mercury* or complaining about it."

This was almost entirely owing to Mencken. He shaped the magazine's robust, irreverent, contentious character, and his own contributions to it were

what readers most avidly sought. No matter where his writing appeared, it was quoted widely, his pungently outspoken opinions debated hotly. Nobody else could make so many people so angry, or make so many others laugh so hard. When, in the second volume of his *Prejudices*, he ridiculed the South as "The

Sahara of the Bozart," a place "almost as sterile, artistically, intellectually, culturally, as the Sahara Desert," the region rose in righteous outrage; Mencken couldn't have visited Dixie without

an armed escort—or an army. He was trying single-handedly to drag American culture out of Puritanism and into the twentieth century, to act as fugleman (one of his favorite words) on this side of the Atlantic for a literary and artistic renaissance comparable to the one then taking place on the other side. He made *The American Mercury* the chief instrument of this ambitious and unprecedented undertaking. To an astonishing degree he succeeded, and along

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the way he became, Edmund Wilson wrote, "without question, since Poe, our greatest practicing literary journalist." Teachout calls this "understatement," and I agree. Mencken was the greatest of *all* American journalists, and he remains that. Indeed, he is the only one who deserves to be called great.

This, as Mencken doubtless would have been the first to point out, has the sound of damnation with faint praise. The newsroom is not a place toward which greatness naturally gravitates. Journalism trades in the ephemeral. Those who practice it tend to imagine that the ephemeral has consequence and that, accordingly, so do they. Mencken knew this to be malarkey, and he said as much in his splendidly acerbic essay "Journalism in America." People who imagine this is not the case are counseled to examine the journalism shelves of used-book stores, lined as they are with collection after col-

as stale as their smoke-clogged rooms, controversies long since resolved or forgotten), but the magnificent prose with which Mencken addressed them has lost none of its freshness, its sparkle, its comedy. Reading that prose is one of the great joys that literacy bestows on the sentient.

The human comedy amused Mencken no end, so it is fitting that he still claims our attention as a great comic writer, nearly a half century after his death. It is interesting that the only other American journalists whose names can be mentioned without embarrassment in the same paragraph as his own—Ring Lardner, A. J. Liebling, and Russell Baker—also have seen the world through the lens of comedy. Interesting, and revealing as well: smug bigwigs in the editors' offices and swaggering Scoop Newsboys on the prowl for front-page bylines come and go, but the wits and

No matter where Mencken's writing appeared, it was quoted widely, his pungently outspoken opinions debated hotly. Nobody else could make so many people so angry, or make so many others laugh so hard.

lection of columns, reviews, and news reports that were stillborn at publication.

Mencken, an obsessive list maker, scorekeeper, and bottom-line accountant, claimed to have written ten million words. Plenty of these were every bit as evanescent as the millions written by Richard Harding Davis, Anne O'Hare McCormick, Arthur Krock, Dorothy Thompson, Grantland Rice, and other journalistic bigfeet of Mencken's day. But he was a gifted practitioner of what Teachout calls "meticulous serial revision," in the course of which pieces originally written for *The Sun* were refined and improved for *The Smart Set* or *The American Mercury* and then went through the whole process once again, this time rising from mere journalism, albeit of an uncommonly high level, into essays of indisputable staying power that found their way into Mencken's many books. The subjects of some of those essays may now be of little interest (writers whose reputations have flowed and ebbed, ancient political conventions

satirists live on, saluting the passing show with the dark, mocking laughter that is the only fit comment on it.

Mencken's life was a show of its own, but until now he has not been especially well served by his many biographers. Isaac Goldberg's *The Man Mencken: A Biographical and Critical Survey* (1925) is hagiography. Edgar Kemler's *The Irreverent Mr. Mencken* (1950) is carping and unsympathetic. William Manchester's *Disturber of the Peace: The Life of H. L. Mencken* (1950) is useful because it had the great man's cooperation, or forbearance, but its prose is most charitably described as execrable. Charles Angoff's *H. L. Mencken: A Portrait From Memory* (1956), by Mencken's assistant of many years, is a spiteful reminder that no man is a hero to his valet. Carl Bode's *Mencken* (1969) is thorough, earnest, and oddly lifeless. Ditto for Fred Hobson's *Mencken: A Life* (1994).

With *The Skeptic*, though, Mencken at last gets his due. Terry Teachout, a

former editorial writer and a freelance cultural journalist who publishes all over the place, tells the story with brio, but he resists the temptation to write what Angoff called, in reviewing the Manchester biography, "carbon-copy menckenesque." He discusses just about everything that needs to be discussed, but in no instance at excessive length: "I have made no attempt to be exhaustive," he writes, "so as to avoid being exhausting." And he has paid scant attention to certain people and events, for the entirely sensible reason that he "felt that they were of little or no continuing significance in relation to the larger story of his life and work." Teachout has read Mencken's enormous oeuvre with obvious care and delight, and also with a clinical dispassion that permits him to discuss this work with candor and discrimination. The same can be said of his treatment of Mencken the man, which is friendly and sympathetic but also—as one likes to think Mencken would have wanted—honest and, when appropriate, unsparing.

The Skeptic is the book I wish I had written, and then some. This requires a brief explanation. Late in 1980, Mencken's centennial year, I contracted with Random House to write a biography of him. I had barely started work on it when *The Washington Star*, where I was employed, went belly-up. I moved over to *The Washington Post*, and quickly decided that I had to abandon the project: I certainly could not ask my new employer for an immediate, prolonged leave of absence, and I worried that intensive exposure to Mencken's prose, with all the temptations to imperfect imitation that it offers, could have deleterious effects on my book reviews and columns.

About a decade later I read with much admiration a piece Teachout wrote about Mencken's diaries (newly brought to light and arousing bitter controversy), and sent him a complimentary letter. After he decided to undertake a Mencken biography, I urged him on in a labor that at times must have seemed overwhelming. Presumably this is why in his acknowledgments he mentions me, along with five others, as having said "the right words at the right times." I never laid eyes on his manuscript. All of which is to say that the judgment of

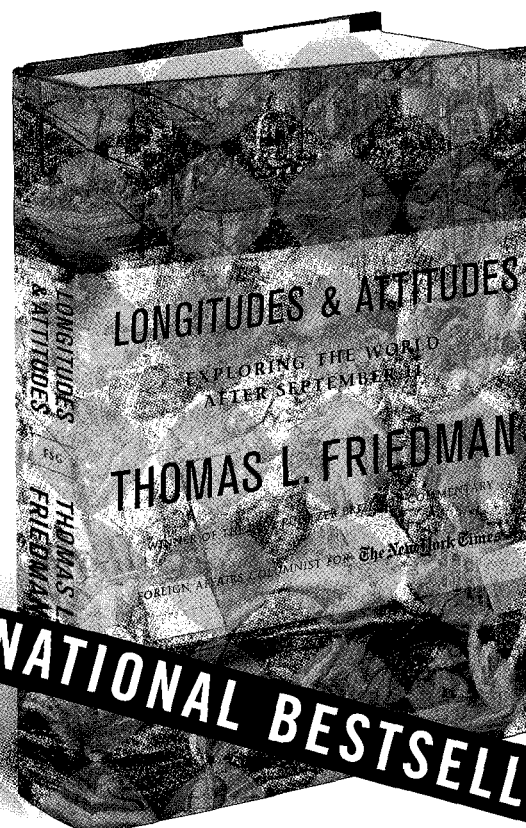
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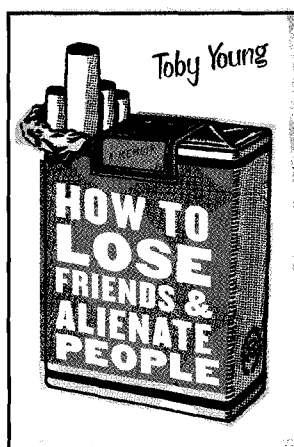
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The Skeptic expressed herein is wholly objective, untainted by personal interest. It is also not without reservations and qualms. *The Skeptic* may well be the best biography ever written of an American journalist, but the competition isn't exactly brilliant and the book isn't without flaws. Teachout's refusal to get bogged down in quotidian biographical minutiae, though admirable, at times causes him to skip too lightly past matters that are more important than this biography will lead the reader to understand or that demand further, more nuanced explication.

Thus Teachout dismisses in little more than a sentence Mencken's complicated and interesting personal relationship with Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, who spent a good deal of time in Baltimore and saw him often. Teachout barely mentions Mencken's deep admiration for Ring Lardner and fails to understand that it was Lardner, not Mencken, who did the most to capture the American vernacular in written prose, as Mencken himself readily and graciously acknowledged. Teachout is terribly hard on Theodore Dreiser, judgmental about him in ways that Mencken himself, his ardent supporter, mostly managed to avoid; to say that Dreiser "was an idiot savant, capable of creating unforgettable characters on paper but devoid of any other gift save an uncanny knack for persuading women to have sex with him" is as oversimplified as it is unfair. Finally, Teachout writes with authority on Mencken's fondness for music, but tells us on one page that Mencken "hated jazz, which he found 'crude and childish,'" and then a few pages later that *The American Mercury* "was the first general-interest magazine to write about jazz in anything like a serious way." Perhaps this is true, but at the least one is left to wonder how, or why, its jazz-hating co-editor let that happen.

If God really is in the details, then Teachout may not be headed for heaven. But if you care more about the big picture, he is in every instance almost exactly right. He sees Mencken and his work both whole and in their subtle shadings. Two decades ago, contemplating the challenge of getting inside Mencken's heart and head, I found the prospect daunting, but Teachout has

met that challenge with imagination and originality. The closest any biographer will ever get to knowing his subject's inner self is an educated and empathetic guess; Teachout's is unfailingly astute.

The biggest problem Mencken presents to his biographer is that in many respects, some of them important, he was not a nice man. As is by now well known, he harbored sentiments that bordered on (alas, they probably were) racist and anti-Semitic. He promoted many black writers of the Harlem Renaissance, and he had many close Jewish friends, yet he had "deeply equivocal feelings" about Jews and, apparently, blacks as well. Though he called many people his friends, and many were thrilled to be called such by so famous (and famously persnickety) a man, his professional memoir and diaries reveal that he held in private contempt innumerable men and women of whom he spoke kindly in public. He was a rank careerist (by the late 1920s he proudly said in a memo to himself that he had achieved "one of the principal desires of man: I have delivered myself from anonymity") and, in Teachout's judgment, a "poseur" whose public utterances and persona were often calculated for effect rather than accurately representing the man's true character and convictions. On top of all that he was a hypochondriac, a workaholic, outwardly sociable yet inward, aloof, and a grouch.

Mostly this is quite obvious and has been remarked on by innumerable others. Teachout goes deeper, finding in Mencken a man who, for all the bluff and bluster and unconventionality he presented to the public, was, as Dreiser put it with an exclamation point, a "cautious conventionalist!" That observation, which Dreiser recorded in his diary, referred to the cloak of sham respectability that Mencken insisted on drawing over himself and Marion Bloom, a woman with whom he had an affair for a while (Mencken routinely pretended that they were chaperoned by her sister), but Teachout sees Mencken's cautiousness as having far broader implications in his life.

That life, except for the three years after Mencken's birth and "the five years of his marriage and his first year as a

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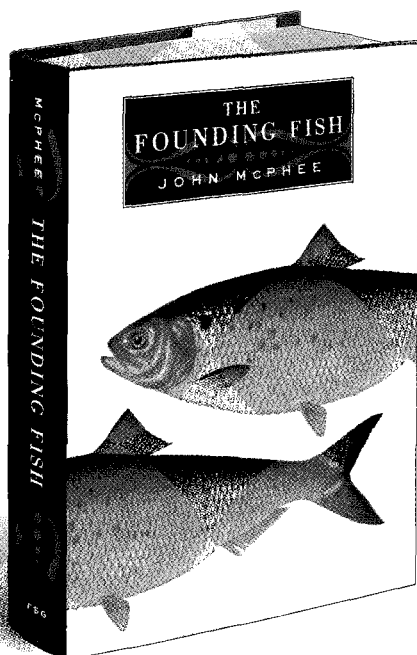
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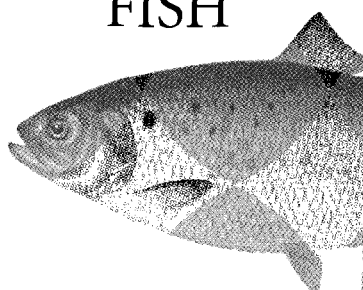
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*Publishers Weekly (starred review)

widower," was lived in the row house at 1524 Hollins Street, on Union Square in Baltimore. "Nothing about his life is as revealing as the fact that he spent so much of it in one place," Teachout writes. "Instead of immersing himself in the frenzied transience of modern-day America, he lived the settled life of a member of the European bourgeoisie, and liked it." His swashbuckling prose disguised a homebody who rarely did anything to excess ("When it came to dissipation Mencken talked a better game than he played") and who was scrupulously attentive to the person with whom he shared the house, his mother, Anna Mencken: "As unlikely as it may sound, the sharpest, cruelest, most self-assured wit in the history of American letters, the fearless scourge of puritanism in all its forms, was a mama's boy." Elsewhere Teachout writes,

It defies easy explanation that so aggressive a writer should have been so personally cautious ... All we have to go on are the facts. By 1908 he was doubling his paycheck through outside writing, and he could have tripled it by moving to New York. Instead he stayed put, secure in the knowledge that whatever lunacies might beset him during the day, he could come home each night to Hollins Street and a plate of his mother's sandwiches. For all the pleasure he took in a schooner of beer, there was no chance in the world that he would die drunk.

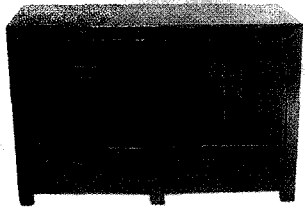
Mencken did not marry until the summer of 1930, five years after his mother's death, when he was nearly fifty years old. Other women had interested him before Sara Haardt entered his life, and he was known as—or liked to represent himself as—a habitué of Baltimore's whorehouses, but he remained steadfastly devoted to his mother as long as she lived. The psychological implications of this I leave for others to explore (Teachout, to his everlasting credit, declines to play Freud except in the most discreet and tentative way), but it is obvious that Mencken placed his mother ahead of all other women. It speaks well of him, then, that when he did marry Sara (who was nearly two decades younger than he, and fated for an early death from tuberculosis, which had been diagnosed well before their marriage), he threw himself

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into it wholeheartedly. He was profoundly grateful for every moment he enjoyed with her, and devastated by her death, in 1935: "Only his mother's death had put more than the lightest of marks on him, and that could not compare to the emptiness he felt as he faced the bleak prospect of life without Sara, unable to find solace in the belief in immortality that neither of them possessed."

Just as the five years of his marriage were the principal ones in which Mencken lived away from Hollins Street, so they were the only ones in which his private life assumed as much importance to him as his work. His brother August, who lived with him after Sara's death and ministered to him from 1948, when he had a stroke, until Mencken's death in 1956, said that to Mencken, "work was the important thing, and everything else had to revolve around it and fit into it." Long before Mencken graduated from high school, he had figured out that reading and writing were what he best liked to do. He read in great gulps—at least a book a day for most of his adult life before his stroke—and he wrote with undisguised gusto. To few people has so utterly congenial a life's occupation been granted.

Probably Mencken is best known today as a prose stylist and a literary critic, but the most important thing about him is that he was a newspaperman. Teachout understands this. Discussing the "firmly balanced prose rhythms and vigorous diction" of Mencken's writing, he cuts straight to the heart of the matter.

It is, in short, a triumph of style. The fact that this triumph was the work of a common newspaperman has long served to obscure its singularity, especially among academic critics. "The smell of the city room," Charles Angoff wrote in 1938, "was in everything he put between book covers." But what Angoff meant as deadly criticism is in fact central to Mencken's appeal. It was the discipline of daily journalism that freed him from the clutches of the genteel tradition. The city room was for Mencken what Europe was for Henry James: the great good place where he became himself.

Bull's-eye. Mencken adored newspapers and newspaper people. He knew everything that was wrong with the

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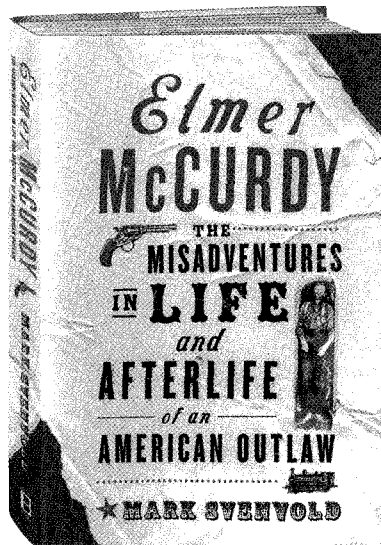
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papers and the people, but from the moment he stepped into the newsroom at the *Herald* he was at home—even more at home, in truth, than he was on Hollins Street. In *Newspaper Days*, his incomparable memoir published in 1941, he recalled with unalloyed delight "the gaudy life that young newspaper reporters led in the major American cities at the turn of the century ... the maddest, gladdest, damndest existence ever enjoyed by mortal youth," a lost yesterday when "the days chased one another like kittens chasing their tails."

Newspapers were quite different then from what they are now. Polite society may have read them, but it looked down on those who wrote and edited them. Precious few newspapermen had Ivy League degrees; indeed, most (Mencken included) had not bothered with college, and journalism had not yet risen to the exaggerated place it now occupies in the academic firmament. It was not a respectable business—it had not started putting on airs and calling itself a profession—and it did not attract respectable people. Mencken, whose father was a cigar maker who had elbowed his way to the upper reaches of the middle class, found his true soul mates among the ne'er-do-wells of the newsroom.

His rise was rapid mostly because he was whip-smart and worked his tail off, but also because the *Herald* was a cheap rag that, as Teachout says, "allowed him to expand into a vacuum." In contrast to it and most other newspapers of the day, *The Sun*, to which Mencken repaired in 1906, was stuffy, but by then he had established himself and was able to move effortlessly into the clubby, old-Baltimore comforts it offered him. Again, Teachout is on the money.

He tried out in its accommodating pages most of the ideas with which he would later wow a national audience. Most of all the *Sun* afforded him a measure of security and stability that few freelancers ever know—a consideration of prime importance to a man who, for all the abandon of his public persona, invariably played it safe in his private life.

Mencken had ideas, all right, but they came at least as much from the gut as from the head. Basically there were two of them: first, he was a devout Social

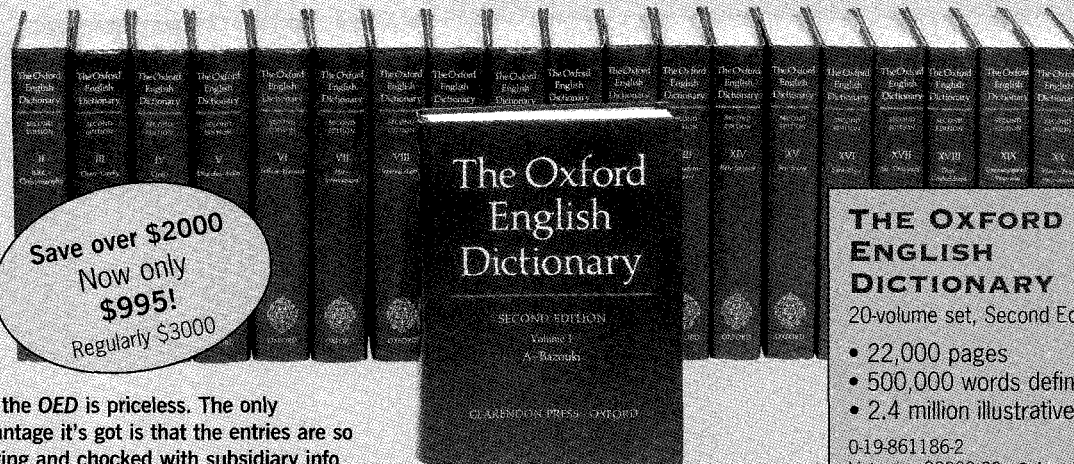
Darwinist who believed, with his idol Nietzsche, that "life was a struggle for survival to which some men were ill-suited by the accident of birth," and second, he was a free-speech absolutist whose "whole life," he told Dreiser in 1915, "will be devoted to combatting Puritanism." The first of these made him a severe critic of America's chaotic democracy who preferred Nietzsche's orderly "new Germany," in which he saw the potential for "a delimited, aristocratic democracy in the Athenian sense—a democracy of intelligence, of strength, of superior fitness," presided over by a "superbly efficient ruling caste" consisting, it goes without saying, of clones of Henry Louis Mencken. His affinity for Germany, his ancestral land, got him in trouble during both world wars. His column in *The Sun* was withheld throughout both, by his own cautious volition, because "he knew the *Sun* would be neither willing nor able to print what he thought." He used the time during World War I to edit *The Smart Set*, write books, and generally advance his own interests. During World War II he concentrated on his boyhood reminiscences and the memoirs that would not be published until after his death.

His long campaign on behalf of the *Übermensch* produced some deliciously lively prose, much of which is still great fun to read, and a good many bruised feelings, which doubtless gave him malicious pleasure. But his one-man war against the bluenoses was the one that really mattered, the one that made a lasting impression on the national culture. When he began writing about literature in America, early in the twentieth century, it was still under the thumb of the enforcers of the genteel tradition—some of whom, it must be noted, were to be found in the editorial offices of *The Atlantic Monthly*. First in *The Sun*, but most influentially in *The Smart Set* and *The American Mercury*, Mencken spoke out with passion and no small courage against the Puritans and in favor of the bold young writers who were trying to be heard. Censorship was still much in the air, and in one notable instance Mencken rushed to Boston to beard that particular lion in its den. He performed wonders for the American reputations

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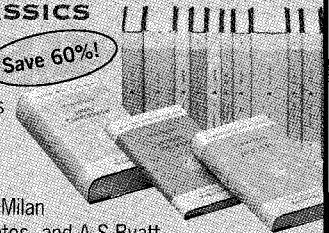
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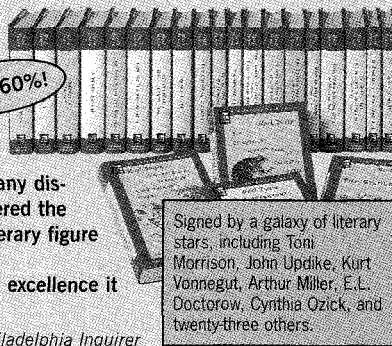
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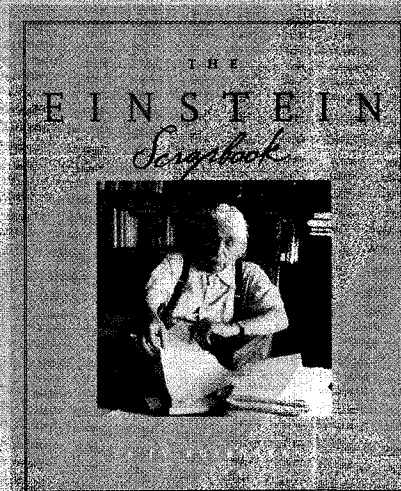
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of George Bernard Shaw and Joseph Conrad, and then turned his attention to Dreiser, Fitzgerald, Willa Cather, and Sinclair Lewis, to name but four.

There were many others. Mencken "saw literary criticism less as an end in itself than as a means of registering 'sharp and more or less truculent dissent from the mores of my country,'" and he rose in praise of any writer who shared that goal. René Wellek claimed in his *History of Modern Criticism* that Mencken "belongs strictly to the past," but he grasped the crucial point: "Mencken fulfilled an important function ... in liberating the American literary scene from the incubus of complacency and conformity, narrow-minded prudery, blinkering patriotism, and stifling conventions about beauty." Yet Mencken held in utter contempt the very American culture that he wanted to liberate. It is time at last to let Mencken himself speak, at length and *fortissimo*, about his native land.

Here ... more than anywhere else that I know of or have heard of, the daily panorama of human existence, of private and communal folly—the unending procession of governmental extortions and chicaneries, of commercial brigandages and throat-slittings, of theological buffooneries, of aesthetic ribaldries, of legal swindles and harlotries, of miscellaneous rogueries, villainies, imbecilities, grotesqueries, and extravagances—is so inordinately gross and preposterous, so perfectly brought up to the highest conceivable amperage, so steadily enriched with an almost fabulous daring and originality, that only the man who was born with a petrified diaphragm can fail to laugh himself to sleep every night, and to awake every morning with all the eager, unflagging expectation of a Sunday-school superintendent touring the Paris peep-shows.

There you have it: *echt* Mencken. There has never been another voice remotely like his in American journalism (though many tried to imitate it and fell short, from William Manchester to Murray Kempton to James J. Kilpatrick) or, for that matter, anywhere else. If words did not exist to serve his purposes, he invented them, and as his delight grew ever greater at seeing the words flow out of his rickety typewriter and onto the page, he brought his prose itself to "the highest conceivable amperage."

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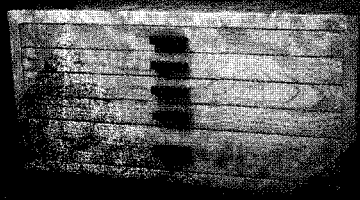
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Perhaps the most famous example of this is "In Memoriam: W.J.B.," Mencken's mocking obituary notice for William Jennings Bryan, a "poor clod," a "peasant come home to the barnyard," motivated solely by "the ambition of a common man to get his hand upon the collar of his superiors, or, failing that, to get his thumb into their eyes." Teachout correctly calls this "one of the great masterpieces of invective in the English language" and cites Edmund Wilson's description of the "eighteenth-century qualities of lucidity, order and force" in Mencken's writing. As Teachout says, his "special gift was to combine this bright clarity with a contemporary tone of voice." Many issues of this magazine could be filled with cases in point, but I would like to offer one that Teachout does not mention. It appeared in *The Evening Sun* on March 7, 1921, and deals with the literary style of Warren Gamaliel Harding.

I rise to pay my small tribute to Dr. Harding. Setting aside a college professor or two and half a dozen dipsomaniacal newspaper reporters, he takes the first place in my Valhalla of literati. That is to say, he writes the worst English that I have ever encountered. It reminds me of a string of wet sponges; it reminds me of tattered washing on the line; it reminds me of stale bean-soup, of college yells, of dogs barking idiotically through endless nights. It is so bad that a sort of grandeur creeps into it. It drags itself out of the dark abysm (I was about to write abscess!) of pish, and crawls insanely up the topmost pinnacle of posh. It is rumble and bumble. It is flap and doodle. It is balder and dash.

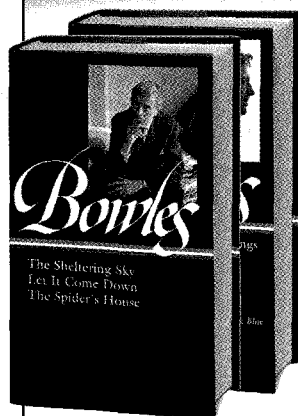
Those nine sentences could be the high point of a lifetime's work for anyone else. Mencken wrote them in—what? two minutes?—at his desk at *The Sun* or on Hollins Street, a rancid Uncle Willie cigar clamped between his teeth, his beady eyes staring gleefully at the carriage rattling across the page. Gene Fowler, one of the more celebrated hack journalists of Mencken's day, once wrote, "Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead." Well, for Mencken writing really *was* easy. If ever he suffered a moment from that form of exquisite self-indulgence called writer's block, there is no record of it.

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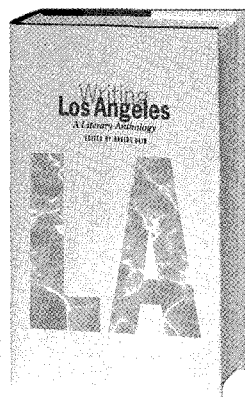
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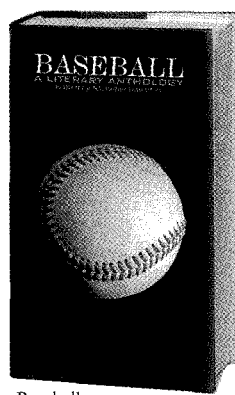


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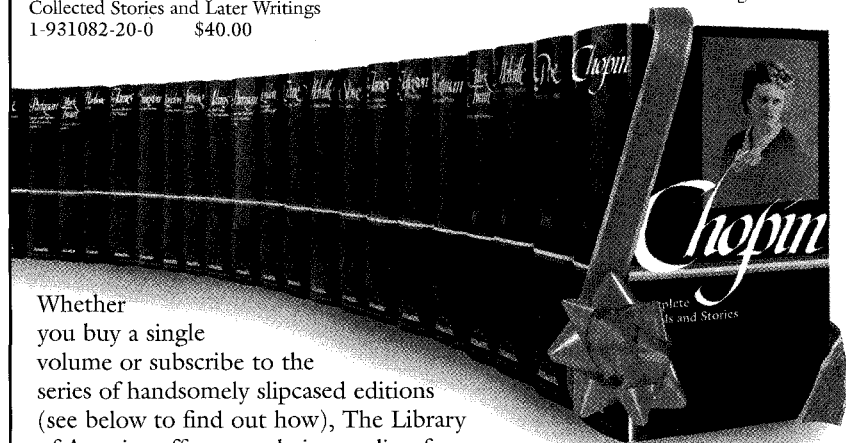
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Writing was the great joy of his life, greater by far than food or drink or sex, so his every working day was a holiday.

Possibly it never gave him more pleasure than when, relatively late in life, he moved from criticism and polemics to memoir. By the time Mencken turned fifty, just short of a year after the Crash of 1929, the man who had forced open the gates to let in the new was interested only in the old and familiar, and this had begun to show in his writing. Then something rather miraculous happened. Katharine White, at *The New Yorker*, invited him to submit pieces. In 1936 he sent her "Ordeal of a Philosopher," a sunny reminiscence of his boyhood in Baltimore. She loved it, and asked for more. It proved to be Mencken's rebirth, for, Teachout writes, "the ornately colloquial prose with which he had spent years belaboring the follies of novelists and politicians proved an ideal medium for the telling of shaggy-dog tales about his childhood and adolescence." In the end these pieces became books: *Happy Days*, *Newspaper Days*, and *Heathen Days*—an autobiographical trilogy that is a classic of American literature, one to rank with Mencken's own favorite, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

All three volumes are still in print, along with several of his other books. This is why he is still among us, and why he will remain so. Teachout believes that Mencken is in for "rehabilitation" because his "social and political views, long thought irreversibly outdated, have become a resurgent strain in American thought." He may be right, but I rather doubt it. Mencken's "conservatism" was more a state of mind than an ideology. It had, and has, little in common with what now passes for conservatism, and diehard ideologues of that persuasion will find small comfort in his claim that he was "constitutionally unable to believe in anything absolutely." With one exception: he believed in the word, and he wrote it like an angel. An avenging angel, but an angel all the same. ▀

Jonathan Yardley is the book critic of *The Washington Post*. He has written six books, among them biographies of Ring Lardner and Frederick Exley, and he is the editor of H. L. Mencken's *My Life as Author and Editor*.

A NINE-HOUR RESURRECTION

Alexander Herzen, Marx's rival and Tolstoy's nonfiction counterpart, enjoys a well-deserved return to center stage in Tom Stoppard's The Coast of Utopia

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

.....

Writing in 1948 in his one-man-band magazine *Politics*, in which he introduced some excerpts of Alexander Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts*, Dwight Macdonald observed sadly that this author and his writings "have never caught on with American readers." He continued, "Most people to whom I mention Herzen have either never heard of him or confuse him with another nineteenth-century founding father, Herzl, or with the physicist Hertz, he of the waves."

Theodor Herzl produced a utopian novel, *Altneuland*, about the once and future destiny of European Jews, and is the only such imaginative writer whose efforts have resulted in the founding of an actual state (whether utopian or, for some of its subjects, the reverse). So he stays in our everyday discourse whether readers chance to recognize his name or not. Herzen composed a literary monument, of memoir and philosophy and polemic, that is the nineteenth-century nonfiction equivalent of Leo Tolstoy's. But he is neglected because the work of early Russian cultural revolutionaries is still refracted by the notorious dystopia that ensued. The shroud that has fallen over Herzen was not so much lifted as shaken out by Sir Tom Stoppard earlier this year. In three plays—*Voyage, Shipwreck*, and *Salvage*, collectively titled *The Coast of Utopia*—he in effect demanded that audiences at the Royal National Theatre, in London, commit about nine hours of their leisure to a reconsideration of the roots of the Russian Revolution. Onstage were Marx and Bakunin, Pushkin and Turgenev, Kossuth and Mazzini. But the commanding figure, emotionally and morally and intellectually, was Alexander Herzen. This—I believe—is because it is impossible to reflect on his life and prose without a piercing sense of a missed opportunity,

of the engagement or encounter that might have made all the difference—in history and in legacy. Such fated conjunctures or non-conjunctures have been a Stoppardian motif from *Rosencrantz and*

Guilденstern Are Dead to the more modern *Travesties*. There is every hope that Lincoln Center, in New York, will soon invite Trevor Nunn, the director of the London production, to bring the trilogy to this country—and

perhaps prove Dwight Macdonald to have been too pessimistic.

Unless I have mistaken what seems an obvious allusion, *The Coast of Utopia* must refer to the famous stage setting for

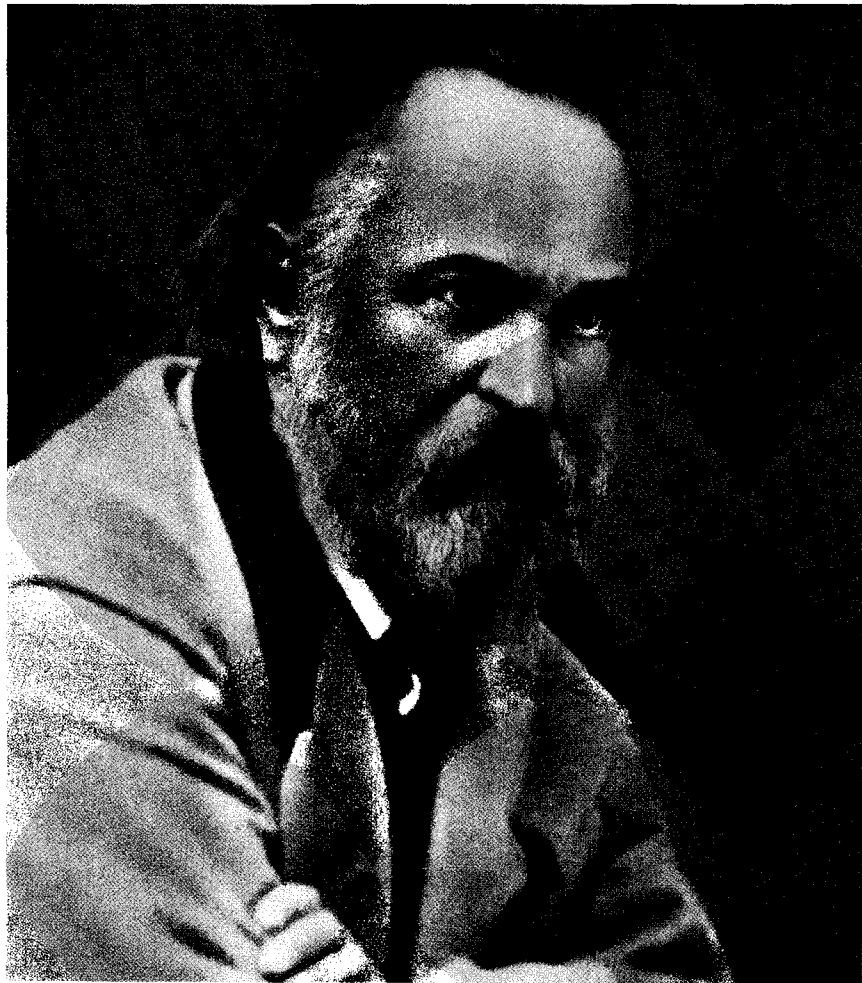
The Winter's Tale, which mentions the no less problematic sea-coast of Bohemia. (Patrick Leigh Fermor, in his delightful and deceptively innocuous ambulations through Mitteleuropa between the wars, spent some good literary time trying to establish whether or not Bohemia had ever had a shore.) Bohemia is to most of us a territory only of the mind, even if it is more accessible and more desirable than Utopia. To Stoppard, it may be more than that. Raised by a Czech Jewish refugee mother and a roast-beef Anglo-Indian British officer (who gruffly told the boy, "Don't you realize that I made you British?"), he is well able to think of Bohemia as the province adjacent to Moravia and Slovakia and in an unending battle over nationhood and identity, and also as the remnant of a drowned world in which Jewish Europe was lost almost as utterly as Atlantis. He has both an actual and an aesthetic kinship with Václav Havel, a fellow Czech whose first vocation was that of playwright and whose satirical but highly practical politi-

THE COAST OF UTOPIA

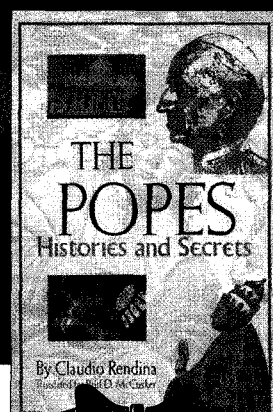
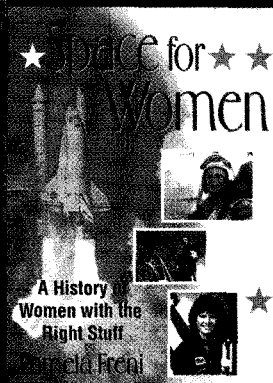
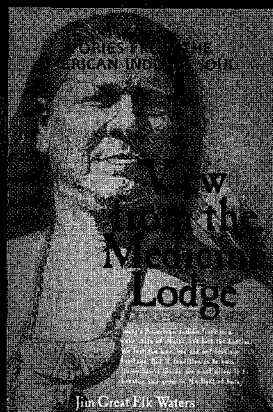
by Tom Stoppard

MY PAST AND THOUGHTS

by Alexander Herzen



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cal revolution was partly “staged” during the convulsions at the Magic Lantern theater, in Prague, in 1989.

This might give Stoppard an imaginative sympathy with Herzen, who was born in Moscow in the year of cataclysm 1812, and whose life’s crucial date was 1848, a year of no less seismic European moment. Herzen had a snobbish and costive Francophile Russian father, and a German mother who may never have been granted the official status of full-dress Russian Orthodox “wife.”

Boyhood memories of growing up in slave-owning and serf-holding families have a tendency, not at all discreditable, to resemble one another. (Perhaps all such households were happy and unhappy in the same ways.) Herzen’s account of his guilt and shame, which I believe to be the finest of them all, is distinguished by two things. First, he had a startling ability to convey the less shocking but more telling details. And second, he realized while still at a tender age that his mother was a victim of his father’s gross cruelty in the ownership of human property—not, of course, in being herself a slave but in being held captive and complicit in a frigid exile. In any event, Herzen’s awareness of the varying degrees of servitude was acute.

Slave-owners usually take into account the *insurance* premium of slavery, that is, the maintenance of wife and children by the owner, and a meagre crust of bread somewhere in the village for the slave in old age. Of course this must be taken into account; but the cost is greatly lessened by the *fear* of corporal punishment, the impossibility of changing their condition, and a much lower scale of maintenance.

I have seen enough of the way in which the terrible consciousness of serfdom destroys and poisons the existence of house-serfs, the way in which it oppresses and stupefies their souls. Peasants, especially those who pay a fixed sum in lieu of labour, have less feeling of their personal bondage; they somehow succeed in not believing in their complete slavery. But for the house-serf, sitting on a dirty locker in the hall from morning till night, or standing with a plate at table, there is no room for doubt.

This makes an almost perfect complement to our American knowledge of the distinction between house slave,

field slave, and sharecropper. It also insists on the critical yet unquantifiable element of humiliation. (In reviewing Peter Kolchin’s comparison of the Russian and American systems, C. Vann Woodward wrote that many Russian plantation holders believed that serfs had a different and subordinate “racial” character; the corpses of serfs were believed to prove the theory by having black bones.)

Brought up on the strains of glory emitted by the heroic memory of Russian defiance of Bonaparte in the year of his birth (strains that we associate with Tolstoy and Tchaikovsky but that to him were “my cradle-songs, my nursery stories, my Iliad and my Odyssey”—many of these legends transmitted by the faithful in the slave quarters), Herzen, at only thirteen or so, was struck by the Decembrist revolution of 1825. This broke the silence imposed by czarism and chauvinism. He was to live the rest of his life in an attempt to be true to what he then registered.

The accounts of the rising and of the trial of the leaders, and the horror in Moscow, made a deep impression on me; a new world was revealed to me which became more and more the center of my moral existence. I do not know how it came to pass, but, though I had no understanding, or only a very dim one, of what it all meant, I felt that I was not on the same side as the grapeshot and victory, prisons and chains.

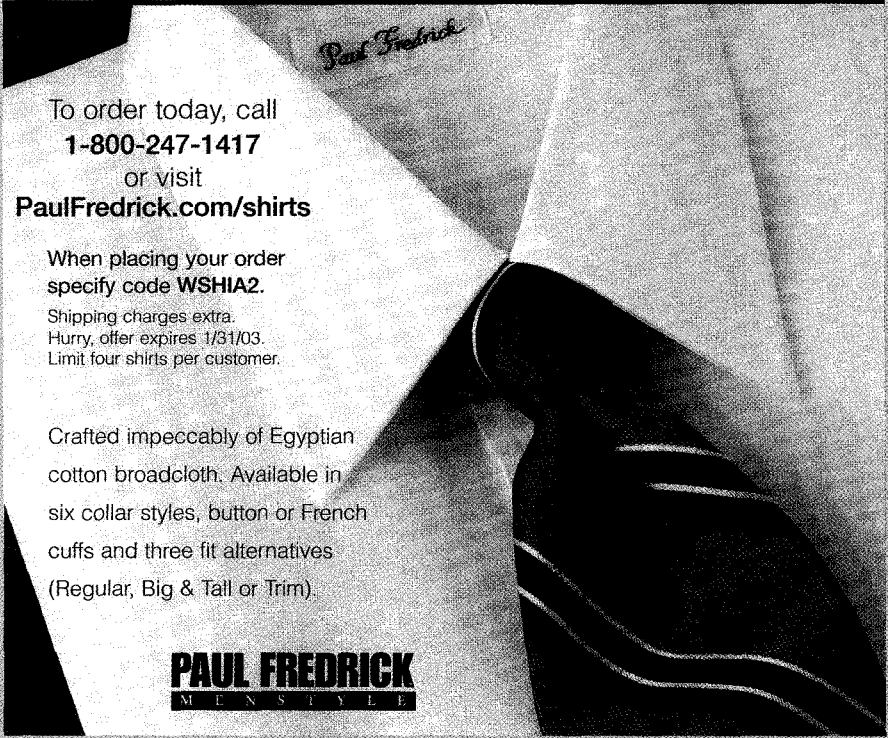
Even in the bleaker years of eighteenth-century Russian autocracy (as we might do well to remember) there had been a general revulsion against the death penalty and an approximate social consensus on its abolition. That the gallant rebel officers of December 1825 should be put to death seemed excessive even to Herzen’s frigid father. But he, and many other sophisticated and literate Russians, had underestimated the mirthless, cowardly, and petulant Czar Nicholas, who chose to celebrate his coronation with a feast of executions. The impression created in the mind of the boy was ineradicable, and for the rest of his life he reserved a special hatred and contempt for all—not just slobbering and insecure monarchs—who commanded the firing squad, manned the gibbet, or wielded the lash.

Herzen and his friend Nicholas Ogarev went out to the Sparrow Hills, overlooking Moscow, and swore an undying oath to resist. In retelling the episode Herzen was quite aware that there was pathos and posturing on the part of the two ephebes. But he managed to salvage the elements of dignity and daring, and to write a few imperishable paragraphs on the tricky subject of passionate boyhood friendship.

The next phase was predictable enough: student rebellion, estrangement from family and respectability, sexual adventure, and—this being the reign of Nicholas—spells of jail time and finally banishment to Vyatka, near Siberia. There was something curiously modern yet especially Russian about the police state of that period. It spread a net of spying and informing, and it employed the means of terror. But it discouraged, for example, journals from praising the Czar and thus risking the impertinence of even passing a favorable comment on his right to rule. In this stultifying context the impact of Schiller and Voltaire on young minds, and the influence of revolutionary events in France and Ireland and Italy, can be imagined. Or rather, need not be imagined, because Herzen re-created them so well for us. Evidently, the best recourse was emigration, and the magnet city—or Mecca—was Paris. Herzen, perhaps fatefully endowed by now with much of his father's fortune, quit Moscow in 1847, was consumed by the victories and defeats of revolution in 1848, removed himself from the mainland to London in 1852, and died in 1870, on the eve of the Paris Commune and the related events that brought the once romantic European left under the sway of his rival Karl Marx. Had he not quarreled with Marx and yet been flatteringly mentioned by Lenin, he might have been obliterated by later Soviet scholarship. As it was, official scholastic pedantry doggedly tried to claim the man who once proposed socialism not as something "scientific" but as something that could cut with the grain of human nature and Russian society.

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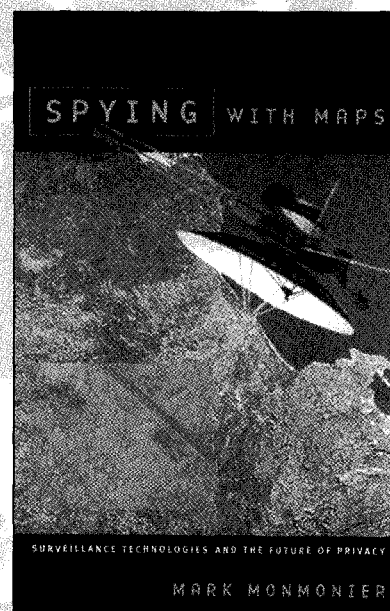
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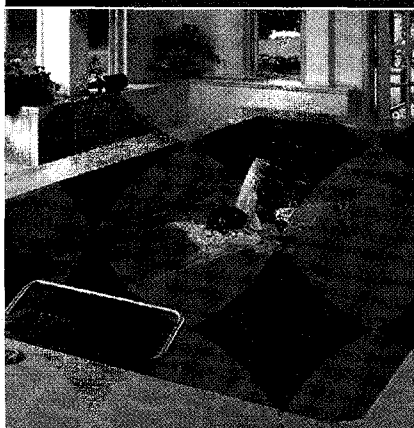
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Socialism, 1812-1855 (1961), Martin Malia wrote that the theory "was born amidst a class more archaic than the bourgeoisie—the gentry or aristocracy (*dvorianstvo*), a class in which, according to all recognized canons in such matters, Marxist or otherwise, socialism ought not to take up abiding historical residence." Later Herzenists, including Stoppard, have challenged this materialist view, because it led Malia to misconstrue Herzen's later writing as having been too limited by the circumstances of his upbringing. Without having to take a side on this, one ought to see from the excerpts above that the life of the gentry, involving direct daily contact with serfdom and brutality, was fairly certain at least to instill the stirrings of abolition even in its averagely sensitive sons and daughters. No, the real contradiction in the Herzen position was better stated by Isaiah Berlin, not usually considered a friend to the dialectical method but here writing about what he knew best.

A leading representative of the dissident Russian gentry, [Herzen's] socialist beliefs were caused less by a reaction against the cruelty and chaos of the *laissez faire* economy of the bourgeois West—for Russia, then in its early industrial beginnings, was still a semi-feudal, socially and economically primitive society—than as a direct response to the agonising social problems in his native land: the poverty of the masses, serfdom and lack of individual freedom at all levels, and a lawless and brutal autocracy. In addition, there was the wounded national pride of a powerful and semi-barbarous society, whose leaders were aware of its backwardness, and suffered from mingled admiration, envy and resentment of the civilised West. The radicals believed in reform along democratic, secular, Western lines; the Slavophiles retreated into mystical nationalism, and preached the need for return to native "organic" forms of life and faith that, according to them, had been all but ruined by Peter I's reforms, which had merely encouraged a seditious and humiliating aping of the soulless, and, in any case, hopelessly decadent West.

Berlin wrote this in 1968, preoccupied with the contemporary problems of Russian and Eastern European dissidents (later in the essay he referred to

FOR THE FIRST TIME, PERHAPS, A TENABLE HISTORY OF JESUS

It won't be found in the Bible. Critical examination of the New Testament Gospels reveals sloppy history, perhaps deliberately deceptive, giving a picture of Jesus more imaginative than factual. Most Christians seem not to notice or care—transcendentalism spins its own reality. But true realists, for whom historical accuracy matters, may be pleased with what the recently discovered *Gospel of Thomas* provides: 113 notes taken down by Thomas of perplexing things Jesus said. Such notes were probably made at the times they were heard and have not suffered alteration—the best kind of source for a history.

Jack Hannah in *You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism* recognizes the notes as chronologically ordered and correlative with the skeletal history used in the *Gospel of Mark*. Hannah provides all the text of *Thomas* and all Marcan context, and upon this develops a narrative about Jesus that is tenably historical.

This *historical* Jesus based his teaching on the Epicurean philosophy; e.g. in place of Judaism's practices of fasting, praying, almsgiving, and obeying food laws, this *historical* Jesus said, "Tell no lie and do not do what you hate."

This *historical* Jesus never mentioned devil, demons, or hell. And the most radical influence of Epicureanism on Jesus' thought was that God and Caesar are man-made authorities and that one's ultimate authority should be oneself.

Hannah's book is 321 pgs., pbk., \$12 postpaid.

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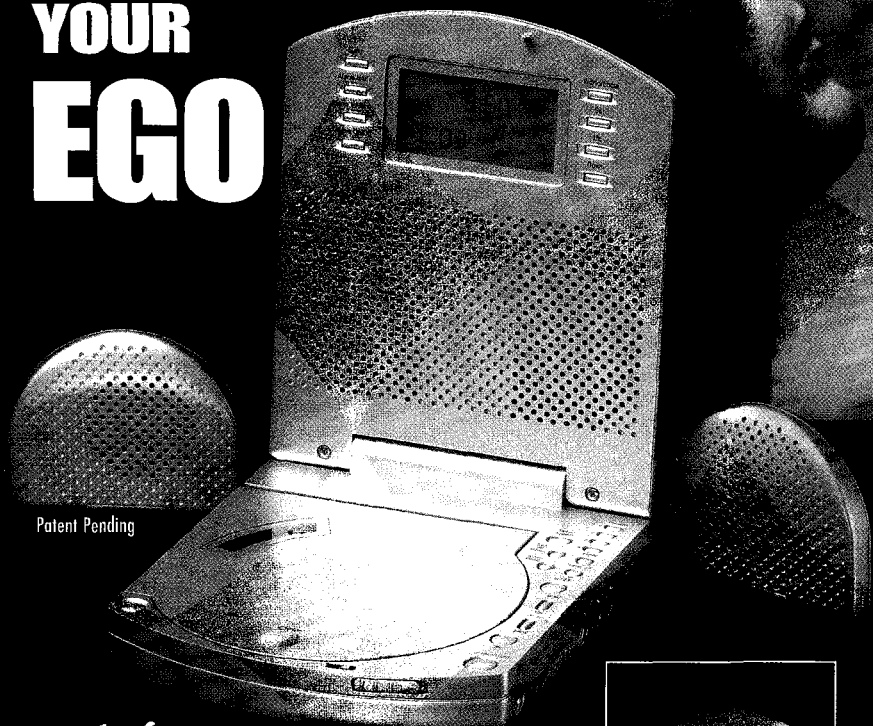


the old czarist order in Russia as an "evil régime," anticipating a celebrated later description of its successor). But scan this again through our current optic, and what are we reading but an incisive depiction of today's Middle East?

Herzen had no more chance of "Westernizing" Russia—this being correctly described as the "radical" rather than the "organic" and theocratic conservative option—than a secular Saudi dissident would have of Westernizing Saudi Arabia today. But after escaping the reactionary miasma that enveloped Europe following the disastrous defeat of the 1848 revolutions, he managed to organize an impressive moral and political opposition. In London he founded a radical journal—*The Bell*—that printed essays and analyses of a high literary order and that achieved a certain prestige and circulation even within Russia itself. Herzen received a stream of guests, was forever emptying his wallet to support penniless exiles and vagrant impostors, and kept in touch with equivalent groups from other oppressed nations. He stands comparison in this respect with Mazzini and Kossuth, both of whom also ended up in London, which in those days was, paradoxically, the most conservative capital in Western Europe and the one most hospitable to freedom fighters.

Attempting, perhaps, to resolve the contradiction between radicals and Slavophiles, he produced a thesis that the world of the Russian rural commune, with its egalitarian spirit and commitment to honest work, was a socialist society in utero. This places him in company with Owen, Fourier, Saint-Simon, and the others who urged a "harmonious" and "natural" (if somewhat conformist and insipid) ideal of "community." Marx and Engels described these and similar projects as "utopian," and they by no means employed the word as a compliment. They preferred the more forbidding word "scientific" when outlining the radiant future. They also, Marx in particular, distrusted Herzen for being a Russian. (One day soon I intend to write a study of the way that Marx and Engels abominated all things Russian and rather admired all things American. It will require a

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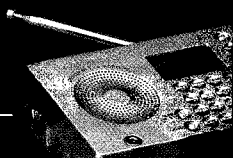
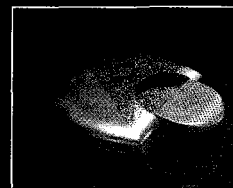


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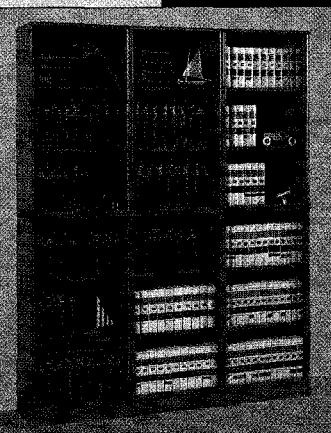
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stronger title than the obvious *Ironies of History*.)

By a smaller irony, Herzen's nemesis was someone whose character and temperament he held in some esteem. Mikhail Bakunin, the charismatic anarchist and internationalist, was a colossal figure in those days, appearing not to know the meaning of fear, let alone prudence. In 1862 Herzen, rather against his better judgment, allowed himself to be persuaded that a revolution in oppressed Poland might help to ignite a sympathetic uprising in Russia. But Bakunin's hectic and irresponsible adventurism—marvelously captured by E. H. Carr in *The Romantic Exiles*—ensured that everything went off at half cock, with the Polish revolutionaries being assured of help that never came, and with their brave Russian co-thinkers vulnerable to charges of treason. A terrible Slavophile backlash ensued, with every liberal in Moscow accused, in effect, of aiding and abetting a Polish terrorist scheme. Nothing is more lethal to liberal and socialist aspirations than competing xenophobias, and among the chief victims of this calamity was *The Bell*, which lost almost all its circulation. Herzen's remaining years of life were poisoned by financial exigency (he finally stopped being an easy touch for any posturing revolutionary mendicant), by malicious accusations from hard-faced radicals that he had sold out, and by a series of personal tragedies and sexual humiliations that, to be appreciated, simply have to be read in full. (Vladimir Nabokov is said to have admired *My Past and Thoughts* so much that he tried retrospectively to alter its title to something less pompous-sounding.) More annihilating than anything, one suspects, must have been Herzen's realization that from now on the initiative would come not from those who spread emancipating ideas but from the sanguinary clash of nations and classes. This has been the fate of conscientious radicals throughout history, but nobody ever recorded the emotions of disaster and disillusionment with more care and scruple and poetry than Herzen did. ▀

Christopher Hitchens is a columnist for Vanity Fair. His most recent book, Why Orwell Matters, was published last month.

CONCRETE EXPRESSIONISM

.....

Few writers could get away with a novel in which the bulk of the story—a fictionalized version of America's postwar art scene, distilled through the memory of a seventy-eight-year-old woman—is reported rather than dramatized, but Updike pulls it off beautifully. The action, such as it is, consists of a day-long interview in Vermont of Hope Chafetz, a painter twice married to famous artists (the first of whom distinctly resembles Jackson Pollock) and finally to a man "in money." The interviewer, a young woman from New York, checks occasionally to be sure her tape recorder is running, pages through her notes, and uses the bathroom. Hope makes sandwiches. They tour the yard and look into Hope's studio. From such banalities Updike, with his immense talent for making details tell, milks a rich life for Hope and a nuanced, unwaveringly realistic relationship between the two women. Mostly, however, this is a novel of ideas. Hope muses about her distant, Protestant God and ruminates about the role of the wife of a genius. (Although the latter bits are gracefully written, their focus on events and feelings long past renders them somewhat bloodless.) Surprisingly, most immediate and convincing are the discussions about abstract expressionism (which I would think would be most difficult to translate into precise and compelling sentences): the effect of particular paintings and styles, the purpose behind specific techniques, the artists' ambitions, and Hope's provocative theories about women's and men's artistic capabilities. —CHRISTINA SCHWARZ



SEEK MY FACE
by John Updike
Knopf

SOCIOPATH ON A STRING

.....

The Adventures of Pinocchio, which Carlo Collodi first published, in serialized form, in 1881, has spawned

hundreds of translations—many of them in appropriately wooden prose—and countless versions for the theater and the screen. In America, at least, most of these have long since been eclipsed by Walt Disney's song-and-dance extravaganza. And indeed, with its hummable score and ominous underpinnings, that 1940 production does stand head and shoulders above much of the Disney canon, in comparison with which it resembles *Crime and Punishment*. Still, what about the original? Steerforth has now published an excellent new translation of Collodi's text by Nancy Canepa, and readers who know only the Disney version will find that although the moral of the story is the same, the atmosphere is darker and more dangerous. This is no sermon but a bad, sad, tantalizing dream, albeit one with a happy ending.

Some of the differences are merely cosmetic. In the Disney film, for example, Geppetto's cottage is so crammed with toys, clocks, and figurines that it looks like an outpost of FAO Schwarz. Here the old wood-carver lives in a rural hovel, with "a battered chair, a dilapidated bed, and a broken-down little table." More to the point, the puppet himself is something of a sociopath. Encountering the Talking Cricket for the first time, he responds rudely to his little companion's philosophizing: "Shut up, you nasty, bad-luck Cricket!" Then he seizes a wooden hammer from his father's workbench and squashes his interlocutor like, well, a bug. Nor does the mayhem end there. As the translator points out in her introduction, the original serialization concluded with Pinocchio's being hanged from an oak tree. Only a storm of protest from Collodi's readers, most of them still in short pants, prompted the author to write the second, more uplifting half of his tale.

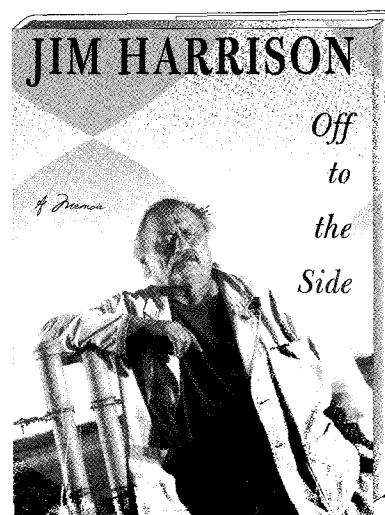
All of this may suggest a collision of Mother Goose with Quentin Tarantino. But the text boasts a good many other, nonviolent charms. Like the very best fabulists, Collodi is slightly skeptical



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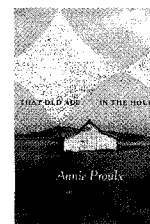
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about human goodness even as he's promoting it, which explains his satirical take on the marionette theater: "The very attentive audience was nearly dying of laughter as it listened to the squabbling between the two puppets, who were gesticulating and insulting each other in every way possible and so realistically that they might have been two rational creatures, two people of this world." And from time to time his high-stepping narrative is marked by moments of real poetry. (When the seemingly dead puppet bursts into tears, the melancholic Owl can only declare, "In my opinion, when the dead cry, it is a sign that they are sorry to be dying.") Luckily there's no need to choose between Disney's version of the tale and Collodi's: we can have both. But if such a choice were necessary, I suppose I'd opt for the original—by, as it were, a nose. —JAMES MARCUS

PANHANDLE

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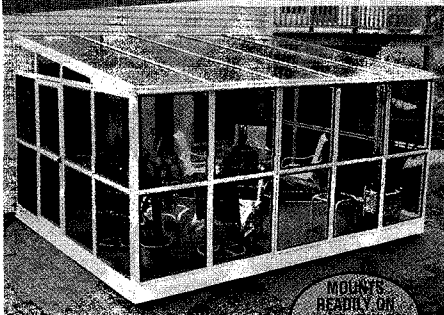
Immense, saucer-flat, and saturated with heat, the Texas Panhandle takes some getting used to, and the same might be said of Annie Proulx's paean to this obdurate corner of the country. We're first introduced to the territory by Bob Dollar, himself a newcomer from Denver. A classic naif, determined to compensate for his parents' abandoning him to a slightly cracked but loving uncle, Bob has taken the unlikely job of persuading cattle ranchers to sell their worn-out land to Global Pork Rind for conversion into hog farms. Never mind that the ranchers are tough old coots with no desire to sell—or that hog farms stink to high heaven, truly outraging anyone who happens to live nearby. Bob rents a bunkhouse in backwater Woolybucket from the garrulous LaVon Fronk and launches a campaign to ingratiate himself with the locals. Instead they captivate him. As Bob bumbles along, we encounter a host of one-of-a-kind characters, past and present, including one Francis Scott



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MOUNTS
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Keister, whose roiling contempt for hog farms doesn't keep him from having an affair with a Global agent that ends bloodily, propelling the denouement. Through these interlocked histories we get an awful lot of detail about windmills, barbed wire, fences, oil, the consequences of being passed up by the railroad, and how much smarter bison are than cows. What we don't get, until well into the book, is a sense of forward movement. Too much of the text feels like only partly digested research, without much happening despite the pileup of stories, and the reader feels the urge to reach out and shake the slightly unreal Bob. But Proulx's luscious, somewhat wacky way with words remains intact (who else would talk about "bronze Polaroid light" or "a weasel-headed horse"?), and by the final pages she has worked her old magic. The novel's slow, eventual unwinding seems to go with the territory, and if Bob's comeuppance arises as no surprise, it is gratifying to see how touched he is by the locals' belief that progress can be stayed. He's even thinking of joining in their efforts. And that, for the often bleak Proulx, is a shiningly upbeat ending. —BARBARA HOFFERT

WALKING TOUR OF THE VANISHED

.....

Joseph Roth, orphaned subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, died at the age of forty-four in Paris in 1939. He left behind one great novel, *The Radetzky March*; some considerable ones; and hundreds of short works, most of them newspaper articles. Over the past couple of decades the translation of Roth's works into English has been gathering momentum, notably through the endeavors of Michael Hofmann. The present work is a collection of feuilletons, short and in this case melancholic sketches, most from the 1920s, a few from the 1930s. They were brought to-



**WHAT I SAW:
REPORTS
FROM BERLIN,
1920-1933**

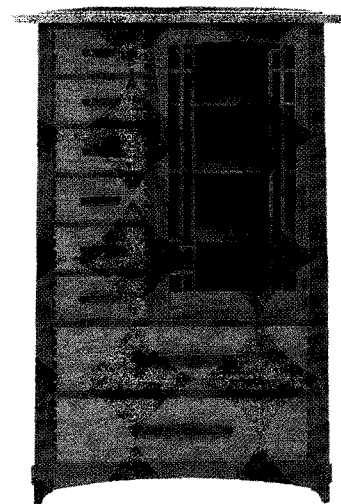
by Joseph Roth
introduced
and translated
by Michael
Hofmann
W. W. Norton

gether in 1996 by Michael Bienert and published in German as a walker's guide to Roth's Berlin. As such, the pieces must appeal less to the day-tripper and more to some Sebaldian connoisseur of loss—not only because the Berlin Roth depicted has vanished but because even as he described its qualities and people, his true subject was the emptiness, ephemerality, and unreason of Weimar Germany, which to Roth, Berlin epitomized: the city was "an aimlessly sprawling stone emblem for the sorry aimlessness of our national existence."

As these thirty-four pieces show, the writer's sympathies are with the down-at-heel, the misfits and outsiders and exotic relicts of a past way of life. He visits the demimonde of burglars, light-bulb thieves, pimps, and prostitutes. He wanders through the Jewish quarter, "a strange and mournful ghetto world" whose denizens are refugees from the East, and where he finds Solomon's Temple rebuilt, "in miniature of course," the labor of nine years. He extols the unassuming vocation of park wardens, and considers the predicament of a man released from prison after fifty-one years because "the authorities were in a good mood."

Throughout, Roth, self-styled poet and philosopher, confronts the sights around him as phenomena whose implications, usually dispiriting if not downright macabre, are never apparent but must be winked out. In one disquieting piece he visits a steam bath, open all night in 1920. Here is revealed a netherworld of the homeless who, to gain shelter within its walls, must strip and perform a travesty of the routines of its daytime patrons. Indeed, Roth's best observations are built on such bleakly ironic conceits. Thus in 1923 he includes the unidentified dead in the number of "displaced persons" who, in the war's aftermath, haunt the streets of Berlin. Their photographs make up a gallery at police headquarters: nameless, reproachful of the living, they are the city's "obscure children," a reminder that "life isn't as serenely beautiful as the Pathé News would have you believe."

Roth is staggered by the city's sheer miscellaneousness. "Never," he wrote, "was so much order thrown at disorder,



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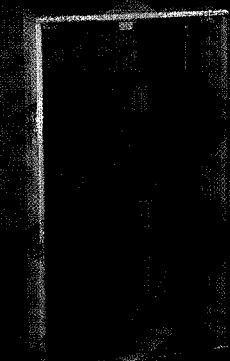
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so much lavishness at parsimony, so much method at madness." He is horrified, yes, but fascinated, too, by Berlin's noise and visual chaos: "a noisy, parping, surging color, red and yellow and violet yells ... a network of wires overhead, a slashed and cross-hatched sky, as though some engineer had scrawled his deranged circuits across the ether."

Though a sense of foreboding is detectable in these pieces, the emphasis—until the very last one, written in 1933 in Paris—is less on what the future may bring than on its representing an increasing rift with the past, for which Roth feels a despairing nostalgia. "Regret for the passing of the old forms," he writes, "is like the grief of some antediluvian creature for the disappearance of a prehistoric state of being." That desolation is especially palpable in his tribute to the assassinated Walther Rathenau. To us, the murder of the Jewish statesman by right-wing extremists was perhaps the first, irreversible step toward the triumph of Nazism; to Roth, it was the destruction of a man who personified conciliation, the sort of melding of diverse elements that the Austro-Hungarian Empire represented to the writer—fancifully or otherwise. —KATHERINE A. POWERS

HOTHOUSE FLOWERS

.....

We're forty years this side of *The Feminine Mystique*, but at this point it has become impossible to figure out which group of American females is in the biggest funk. The binging/purging, self-mutilating early adolescents of *Reviving Ophelia*? The harried and exhausted working mothers of a thousand earnest tomes on "work/life balance"? Or—as one might conclude after reading Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's new book—the hotshot young career women who can't manage to coax eligible men into the honeymoon suite?

The book gets off to an unpromising start: Whitehead's research centers on her interviews with a group of sixty women, most of whom are white, many of whom attended elite prep schools, half of whom attended highly selective colleges (and the rest "good private colleges and public universities"), a few

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of whom hold graduate degrees, all of whom are pursuing glamorous careers. As we first meet these hothouse flowers, whining about their romantic blunders "over plates of mushroom ragout in a trendy Washington restaurant," trotting along the most fashionable streets of various American cities in "a brilliant alliance: an aspiring Alpha female hooked up with an Alpha city," it's all we can do not to side with the canny men who managed to steer clear of them. But once Whitehead moves beyond these particular women and discusses the roots of their shared problem, which, she believes, lie in the radical changes in the way girls in this country are reared and educated, the book becomes interesting and even moving. She describes a national "Girl Project" that began to take hold in America in the early seventies. I missed being part of this movement by only a few years, yet the differences between my girlhood and that of the generations that followed are stark. The modern girl has played competitive team sports since her earliest childhood; has attended schools that are highly concerned with girls' academic success, particularly in math and science; has attended college in a time when female students outnumber males; has emerged into a job market in which the traditional male jobs are increasingly held by women.

Whitehead, a social conservative who wrote the controversial book *The Divorce Culture*, is hugely admiring of these changes, yet she indicates precisely how they have served to disadvantage young career women in the marriage market. Such women no longer find husbands in college, where the pool of available, like-minded men is large, but rather start looking for a permanent mate about ten years after graduation, when there is no formal "courtship system" in place, no pump room or fraternity formal or Dolly Levi to nudge an appropriate match along. Further, at this point they have joined a pool of prospective



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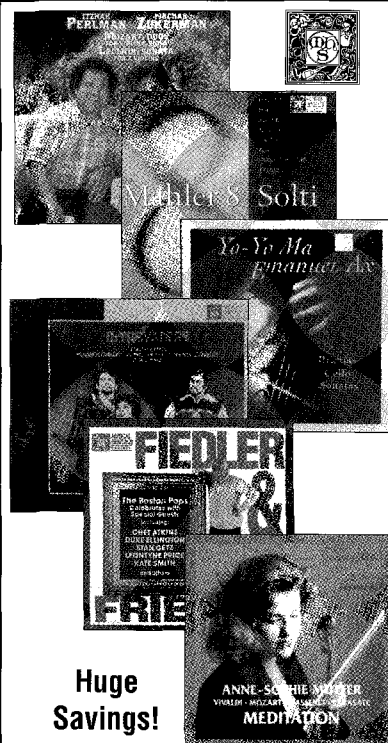
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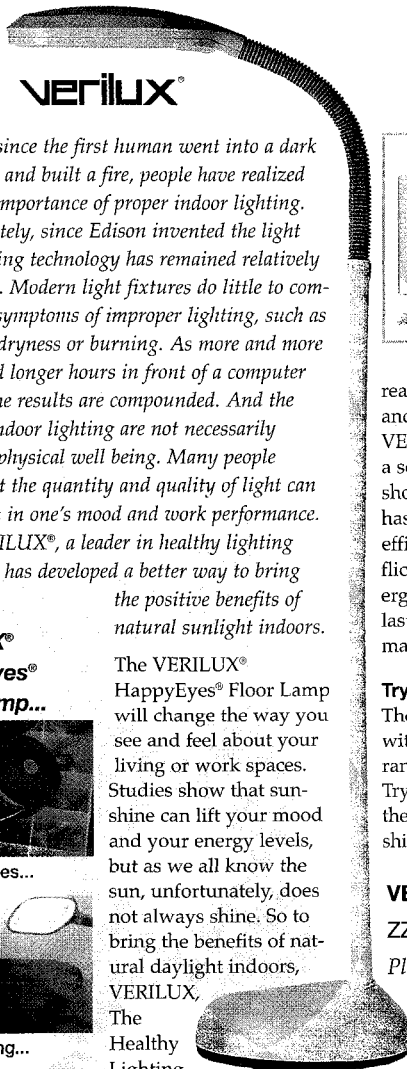
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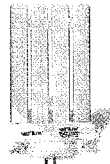
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brides that includes younger women, women less dedicated to their own careers and therefore often more attractive to "career primary" men, and divorced women of all ages. Whitehead accurately points out that many of the sexual liberties that modern women have insisted on in the name of parity are in fact "nicely adapted to men's sexual and romantic self-interests."

Unfortunately, the book sputters out in an inane optimistic conclusion. Whitehead's remedy for this complicated stew of social change and romantic disappointment? Internet dating! Also for-profit introduction services, better time management, and pre-engagement rings from Shreve, Crump & Low. What Whitehead fails to concede (perhaps because she is the mother of two unmarried daughters in their thirties) is that the situation does not lend itself to such easy fixes. She describes one interviewee who is not "looking for someone to take care of her," another who is consistently "driven by the best projects" at work, a third who insists she will only marry a man who will share equally in child-rearing. We are reminded that "today, the woman is free to make the first phone call, to suggest a first date, and to propose sex." These are perhaps laudable advances, but that such women would imagine that they would also elicit a formal, old-fashioned proposal seems naive. The national Boy Project may have taught America's young men to treat women with new respect in the classroom and the boardroom, and it has certainly prepared them for an unprecedented amount of no-strings nooky; what it has not impelled them to do is to make a bride of every hard-charging woman who suddenly—and fleetingly—wants to play fifties girl with a diamond solitaire and a box full of Tiffany invitations. —CAITLIN FLANAGAN

Recent books by Atlantic authors:

Afterglow: A Last Conversation With Pauline Kael, by Francis Davis. Da Capo Press. Davis is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic*.

Love Among the Greats, by Edith Pearlman. Eastern Washington University Press. Pearlman's essay "Neshering" appeared in the December 1998 *Atlantic*.

COMING OF AGE ON LONG ISLAND

Child of My Heart represents a radical—if characteristically quiet—departure in Alice McDermott's fiction

BY MONA SIMPSON

.....

Child of My Heart, Alice McDermott's fifth novel, feels like a departure from her recent, major books. *That Night*, *At Weddings and Wakes*, and *Charming Billy* are intricate novels, full of vivid characters just barely contained in deftly unfolding structures that feel original, handmade. Although this new novel shares some of those books' deepest concerns (each of them presents varieties of romantic love, to which a younger person pays avid attention), its structure, its narrative, and its characters are strikingly different.

In *That Night* and *Charming Billy* there's a clever narrator, roughly of McDermott's generation (she's now forty-nine), who is a very minor character in the novel. These slender narrators, barely there, slide in and out of doors witnessing the action. But in *Child of My Heart* we're given a straightforward first-person narrator, who is also the central character of the book. Therese is fifteen and a beauty. (McDermott has always been interested in beauty, but until now she's written only about those who don't have it.) She's got a charming whimsy, a down-to-earth fifteen-year-old's sense of humor (changing the lyrics of a sad old song from "fond hearts" to "hard farts"), and mystical ideas about art, sex, life, and death. She's the only child of two Irish-Americans who early recognized her as extraordinary and moved to eastern Long Island, like speculators.

My own parents had moved out to Long Island when I was two years old. They had done so because they knew by then that I was the only child they would ever have—they were already in their mid-forties—and that I would be good-looking. Unusually so. A young Elizabeth Taylor was the immediate word. (Later, among the East End crowd, it was a young Jackie Kennedy.) ... Being who they were—children of immigrants, well-read, but undereducated—my parents saw my

future only in terms of how I would marry ... They moved way out on Long Island because they knew rich people lived way out on Long Island, even if only for the summer months, and putting me in a place where I might be spotted by some of them was their equivalent of offering me every opportunity.

The characters who seem to open McDermott's imagination to its full extent are often of her parents' generation. *At Weddings and Wakes* and *Charming Billy* don't concern themselves with upper-middle-class, multicultural society. Rather, they capture a world of middle-class, less assimilated (if well-read) Irish-Americans—a Con Edison worker who recites Yeats; a streetcar driver, an alcoholic who has lost the great love of his youth, and the plain woman he is married to until his death; an executive secretary; a nun who leaves the convent to live in a

Brooklyn apartment with her sisters. This specific, full world, along with McDermott's stringent modesty and moral rigor, allows her to ponder deep contemporary and eternal questions (in her hands they seem to be the same ones) without fuss or bombast. Her talent is not a messy, capacious one: she is more Jane Austen than George Eliot in her vantage, her temperature, and her concerns. Like Austen, she seems to write from firmly within an intact society and would defend its pageantry (the limousines at a wedding contribute to the glamorous lifting vision that forms the children's ability to believe in both love and God), though she's willing to reveal some of the same details as deceptive, the fluff of romance: for example, when the children chew the sugared almonds from the wedding, so pretty in their tulle bags, and spit out the vile woody food. McDermott displays a vibrant romantic hope exactly matched by a realist's awareness of daily devastation.

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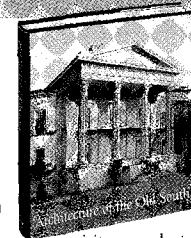


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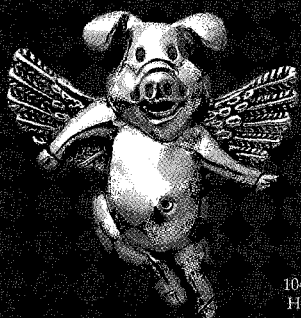
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In those two great books we heard about the wealthy at a remove. But in *Child of My Heart* the rich are viewed closer up, in full color, while Therese's parents are deeply recessed in the narrative, occupied in a conversation of which we hear only bits. Therese moves—as her parents hoped she would—not among the people we're used to in McDermott's books but among doctors, artists, their wives and children.

Neither *At Weddings and Wakes* nor *Charming Billy* proceeds chronologically. Both initially seemed put together as if McDermott had written a novel, snipped it into parts, thrown them in a hat, and reassembled the bits between hard covers, except that the overall effect at the end was not of pieces at all but of a symphonic whole. In *At Weddings*, for instance, she counterbalances two marriages: a messy, long, unhappy one, witnessed by the couple's three children and ending (we know by the middle of the book) in a separation; and the marriage of a former nun and a mailman, middle-aged, subdued, and tragic, yet made real as a miracle performed before our eyes. (It's almost a miracle to convincingly portray middle-aged lovers without blunting the romance or blurring the bald facts of middle age.) In the end we realize that she has worked her pieces puzzle-fashion, shuffling chronology to her own ends, to tell a chronological story of an altogether different subject: the growth of the children's religious faith.

In contrast, with the exception of a few forays into the future (one of McDermott's favorite subversive tricks is to upend suspense by giving away the characters' fates before we get their climactic or essential scene), *Child of My Heart* takes place during one summer. Therese is a gifted baby-sitter, a Pied Piper who attracts both the neglected and spoiled children and the pets of the neighborhood with her offhand, easy care. She baby-sits for the child of an elderly famous painter whose arch, stylish wife rushes off in the beginning with the rough benediction "If my husband tries to fuck you while I'm gone ... don't be frightened. He's an old man and he drinks. Chances are it will be brief."

A middle-aged doctor whose children she babysits can't stop ogling Therese and suggesting that she come swim in his pool, and his trophy wife can't help assuming that the child is sexually available. When she thought her husband was sleeping with the then thirteen-year-old Therese, she had noisy sex with him, within hearing of the babysitter and her own two children.

My first impression was that she had dropped something or lost something and was saying, Oh, what happened, or Oh, where is it? Then I wondered for a second—until I remembered who she was—if she might be attempting to sing.

The exclamation "Oh, what happened, Oh, where is it?" recurs throughout the book, forming a leitmotif of sexuality that Therese contrasts with her own parents' endless, subdued conversation, which they conduct from the moment they wake up in the morning—across the room from each other in their single beds—to the moment they go to sleep again.

Therese comes of age with a stark binary vision of love: the gentle, sexless marriage of her parents, and the coarse world of her employers, where sex is a female-controlled commodity. The now divorced doctor's new fiancée bats his hand off her leg and tells Therese, "Three words to live by ... after-the-wedding." Therese elects not to take the advice. She attempts to redeem sex from the unpromising associations visible in the world around her, to create for herself a less mean way to love.

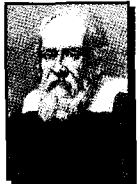
Though Therese's parents moved to eastern Long Island to increase their daughter's chances for a suitable, if not a brilliant, marriage, our story stops well before any wedding. Because this is an essentially contemporary novel, it ends not as Jane Austen's do, with the finality of marriage, but with a loss of virginity and another, far more serious loss. The reader senses that later, when Therese does marry, it will be to someone outside the world of her parents and also outside the world of their hopes for her. One looks forward to that story in McDermott's hands. ■

Mona Simpson is the author of four novels, including The Lost Father (1992) and Off Keck Road (2000).

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WONDERS OF THE WORLD

Three timeless Sicilian places

BY FRANCINE PROSE

.....

When I was very young, my great-aunt gave me a set of the *Book of Knowledge* that had been published, I think, in the late 1920s. I used to read the volumes of the encyclopedia—each bound in embossed dark red with blue lettering—from cover to cover, like novels. It was a deeply strange reading experience, since by the time I got the books, a good deal of the information they contained (certainly much of the science and world affairs) was outdated, and besides, I was too young to understand much of what I was reading. The result was that I scarcely knew or cared what was supposed to be factual and what wasn't. Were the constellations really formed when Greek mythological figures were pasted up in the heavens? As far as I was concerned, they were.

One of my favorite pages was an illustration for a long article on Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*, the Victorian children's classic. Another contained a series of illustrations—I remember them as black-and-white photographs, but of course that is impossible—of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The Statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Colossus of Rhodes. Nothing in the text informed me (or perhaps I ignored what was there) that some of these places no longer existed, if they ever had. In any case, that was information I didn't want, because it would have interfered with my ambition to visit them someday, one by one.

On a recent sojourn in Sicily, I frequently found myself remembering that page in the children's encyclopedia, because it seemed to me that what I was

seeing was as close as I will ever come to the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that in Sicily so many astonishing places are so close together. Within a single day you could, if you wished (given enough stamina and a really hot car), visit Segesta, home to probably the most majestically sited Greek temple and theater in Sicily; head west to the point of departure for Mozia and catch a boat to this ghostly island where an important Phoenician settlement once stood; and finally drive north up to Erice, a town so exquisite that it became the raw material for legends and was for centuries a center of the cult of the goddess Aphrodite. Though you could see all three places in one day, each of them makes you want to stay or to keep returning to watch the effects of the changing weather and the mercurial Sicilian light.

What Segesta, Mozia, and Erice have in common is that they are not only lovely but also mysterious. No one knows why the temple at Segesta was left unfinished—it has no roof, and the thick columns were never fluted—or exactly when it was built. Most scholars agree that it was constructed at some point in the fifth century B.C., by the citizens of Egesta, a settlement of Hellenized Elymians, members of one of Sicily's earliest indigenous groups—the same tribe that founded Eryx, as Erice was originally known.

Lonely, moody, surrounded by mountains, overlooking the patchwork fields in the valley below and (from the theater, which is uphill from the tem-

ple) a vista that extends all the way to the Gulf of Castellammare, Segesta is one of those places where the sky seems to expand as if in response to the heroic scale of what lies beneath it. For centuries it has been the sort of destination that inspired romantic voyagers to contemplate the sublimity and transience of earthly existence, the vast scope of eternity.

When Goethe visited Segesta, the site had not been restored to the extent it has been today; tired from the effort of "clambering about among the unimpressive ruins of a theater," he cut his visit short. Yet his description of the temple's setting still seems fresh and accurate.

The site of the temple is remarkable. Standing on an isolated hill at the head of a long, wide valley and surrounded by cliffs, it towers over a vast landscape ... The countryside broods in a melancholy fertility; it is cultivated but with scarcely a sign of human habitation ... The wind howled around the columns as though they were a forest, and birds of prey wheeled, screaming, above the empty shell.

From the start the prospect of going to Mozia made me a little edgy: sailing across a lagoon to an island on which no one lives but which was once the outpost of a highly developed and cruel civilization. Today there are only ruins, and a small museum in the former home of one Joseph Whitaker, an Englishman born in Sicily who made a fortune exporting Marsala wine. The ride wasn't long—ten, maybe fifteen, minutes. And the boatman was very clear about the fact that he'd be back to pick us up in two hours. Still, as he let us off at the dock on the island, I felt a sharp, irrational stab of panic and abandonment.

What if the fisherman who ferried my husband and me out there got distracted and forgot about us? What if we were stranded, exposed to the elements, alone with the spirits of the Phoenician traders who first came to Mozia in the



The Greek amphitheater at Segesta, with a view toward the Gulf of Castellammare

eight century B.C.? The traders lived in harmony with their Greek neighbors until a series of Carthaginian wars, when Dionysius the Elder of Syracuse, using catapults and battering rams (the state-of-the-art tools of warfare in the fourth century B.C.), destroyed the settlement and much of its population.

My anxiety dissipated as we headed up a walkway, lined on both sides with plants sending up shoots topped with giant scarlet flowers. When we stopped in the tidy villa-museum to orient ourselves, and to reassure ourselves that there was indeed another living human being on the island, I found myself grinning with loony gratitude at the young man who took our money and gave us tickets.

He suggested that we tour the museum before exploring the island, and as we walked into the first of the few small rooms that compose the Museo Whitaker, we stopped short in front of the *Ephebus of Mozia*, a statue, from the fifth century B.C., so arresting and shockingly beautiful that it occurred to me that the boatman

could return two hours hence and find us still standing here, staring at the sculpture.

The marble statue of the young man, the ephebus, was discovered in the northern part of the island, near where archaeologists think there was a temple. It had been buried, lying on its back, covered with stones—hidden, it is thought, during the ghastly siege of Dionysius, in hopes that someone would remember to dig it up after the war was over. But no one was left, or anyway no one who remembered, and the *Ephebus of Mozia* remained in his untimely grave until 1979, when he was at last exhumed.

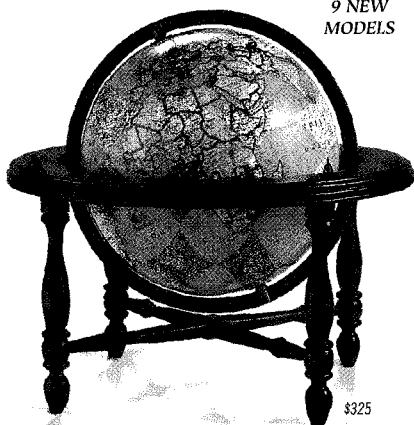
For weeks we had been looking at Greek statuary. In fact, it often seemed that Sicily has as many archaeological museums as it has orange groves, that every small town has its own brown (denoting a cultural attraction) sign featuring the logo of a temple and an arrow pointing to the local repository of coins and potsherds. What was surprising was how many of these modest, un-

promising museums contain a minor masterpiece. Less surprisingly, the larger and richer institutions were fascinating. To browse among their collections of vases figured with masked actors, flute players, dancing girls, centaurs and satyrs, maenads and Amazons, was the closest we could hope to come to watching a film of the daily existence and imaginative lives of Sicily's Greek colonists. Always, there were funerary artifacts—say, a basket of figs carved from stone to ensure that the dead would eat well in their afterlife—and sculptures of young men with shapely bodies and exquisitely rendered musculature.

But there is nothing anywhere like the *Ephebus of Mozia*. Not until Michelangelo would a sculptor again prove able to breathe so much life into marble, to make stone so exactly mimic flesh, and to celebrate the sensuality of the young male body with such control and such impassioned admiration. The *Ephebus of Mozia* is at once fully male and completely androgynous, like some representa-

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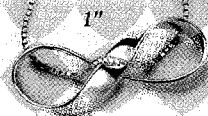
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tive of an earlier, mythic race—before human beings were divided into males and females. Clothed in a tunic that closely follows the lines of his thighs and buttocks, his head turned to one side, his features caught in an expression partway between strength and submission, his hand resting lightly on his outthrust hip, the figure is so frankly sensual, the effect of the work so unmistakably erotic, that I was glad there was no one else in the museum, no other tourists on the island. It would have been embarrassing to look at the statue with strangers around; it is something you'd want to do in private.

At last we managed to free ourselves from the statue's spell. Shortly we headed out across the island, along sandy

Sea gulls shrieked overhead and dove toward the white beach. We could hear and smell and see the steely ocean. Grape arbors and wildflowers surrounded us. The loneliness, the melancholy, and the sheer creepiness of the necropolis contrasted so sharply with the scenery that I began to shiver in the warm morning sun. And once more I found myself praying that the boatman would remember we were out there. Which of course he did.

From our base in the bustling town of Trapani we drove to Erice, arriving in midafternoon on an unusually bright (Erice is famous for its mists and fog) and chilly Saturday in February.



The hillside town of Erice, isolated from below by fog

pathways lined with scrub pines and dwarf palms, down dirt tracks through vineyards, and across the fields of poppies and wildflowers that cover much of the flat, open land. We passed the remains of a black-and-white mosaic floor, the so-called domestic quarters, sacred areas, and "industrial" ones, where the Phoenicians dyed textiles and baked pottery. Finally we reached the necropolis, a collection of tombs—the horrifyingly miniature sarcophagi that were used to inter the children killed in Phoenician religious rituals and later, when infant sacrifice was no longer customary, the small animals that were substituted as victims.

Here again everything seemed deserted and lonely. Too narrow for cars, the cobblestone alleys of the medieval town were so quiet that we could hear our footsteps. The sense of solitude was so eerie that my heart sped up when we turned a corner and saw other people: a couple of expensively dressed Italian tourists ascending the steep street. What were they doing there—and why was she carrying that Fendi shopping bag?

It was the perfect time to visit Erice. You want to be here when no one else is: very early in the morning, in the quiet of an off-season afternoon, or late at night. To be in Erice is to indulge your fantasies of time travel, of what it would

be like to live in the fourteenth century, to see its ghosts come alive, to lose all contact with modern life. Gazing out from the parapets of the town's fortress or twelfth-century castle, looking down across the sea (supposedly, on especially clear days, you can see all the way to Africa), you feel as if you've left the world behind, down below, and that the only way to rejoin it is to let go and plummet straight down. Erice is not the first place I'd recommend to the acrophobic.

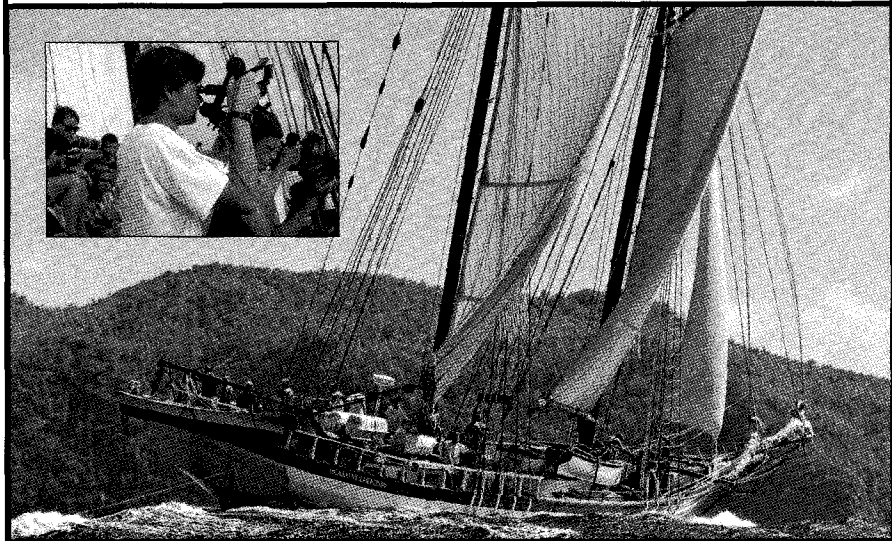
The height, the view, the sweep of ocean and hills—it seems almost laughable that any place could be so lovely. But the town itself was sobering, so severe and frosty that being here felt the way it might feel to be inside a diamond. Its perfection was almost physically painful.

Even the paving stones were aesthetically satisfying. The grass that grew up through the crevices between the polished stones, which were arranged in regular geometric patterns, was such a pleasing shade of green that it could have been chosen from a catalogue. Erice looked more like a stage set than like an organic, living town. And except for the televisions tuned to sports channels in the few cafés that were open, except for an occasional car braving the capillary-thin streets to deliver luggage to one of the town's hotels, there was nothing to spoil the illusion that we had left our own century and moved back into another.

Erice reminded me of Les Baux-de-Provence, in the south of France—also a ruined medieval town that sits on a hill-top and rises out of the living town beneath it. I had that same sense of seeing something that will never change, or never change much, that will remain untouched by the forces that keep shaping and refashioning whatever is alive—untouched, that is, by life itself. To walk the streets of Erice and then drive back down to Trapani, as we did early that evening, was almost like being Persephone, like being permitted to enter the realm of the dead and then return to the noisy, disorderly, and precious province of the living. ▀

Francine Prose is the author of many books, the most recent of which is The Lives of the Muses: Nine Women & the Artists They Inspired (2002). This article will appear in her book Sicilian Odyssey, to be published by National Geographic in March.

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FOOD

GRAPES OF GASCONY

A vintners' cooperative in southwestern France is creating impressive new wines from rare old varieties

BY CORBY KUMMER

.....

One summer evening, as I strolled down the main street of Auch, an unpronounceable city in the heart of Gascony, home of D'Artagnan, the fourth musketeer, I passed one of the outdoor cafés near my hotel. Several men had joined the proprietor at a long wooden table, some wearing the scoop-necked T-shirts of Renoir's boatmen, some even in berets. They noticed me watching one man unwrap a chunk of ham from an awkward paper parcel and put it in the middle of the table alongside his pocket knife. Come join the party, another man motioned. He handed me a glass of wine and a slice of dark-colored ham with plenty of fat. Where had I come from, and why? How long would I stay? What did I think so far? I wasn't used to hearing these welcoming questions in French.

The pale red wine, from an unlabeled bottle, had a powerful depth and a cutting acidity that seemed made to go with rich meat. This region of Gascony, known as the Gers, is the heartland of foie gras, which needs wines with such strong simplicity. The day before, in Bordeaux, at Vinexpo, France's largest wine show, I had met André Dubosc, an animated, kindly man in his late fifties, who filled me with stories of the warmth and generosity of the Gers. He plied me with tastes of the wines made by Producteurs Plaimont, the cooperative he heads, and with the hearty ham his brother cures, the slices gratifyingly rimmed with translucent fat. "You have to go there to see," he told me. "We can export our wine, but we can't export our life. We're lucky we still have it—probably because we're a bit far from everything." He in-

sisted that I visit Saint-Mont, the village near Auch where Plaimont is based. I was eager to learn more about his wines.

For centuries Gers farmers did very nicely making wines to be distilled into Armagnac—one of the world's finest and most expensive brandies. When the men of Saint-Mont returned home after World War II, they found the land badly neglected and their caves for aging wine in a shambles. Like many other small French winemakers who found the expenses of postwar repair too high to bear alone, they banded together in a cooperative. They cleaned and nourished their vineyards, built caves, and erected a new central winery on the main road. The cooperative bought the farmers' grapes and made them into wines for Armagnac.

When Dubosc prepared to assume his responsibilities as managing director of Plaimont, twenty-three years ago, he worried that the cooperative would suffer from several of the steps regional winemakers throughout France had taken in the name of progress. Chief among these was replacing little-known

grapes that were well adapted to the local climate with hybrids from industrial suppliers, who promised bumper crops with minimal effort. (In the past decade France, repository of wine greatness, has lost large swaths of its best vineyards to Merlot and other modish grapes once considered fit only for blending—grapes destined to go back out of fashion.) The efficient hybrids made wines good enough to distill into Armagnac, but not good enough to justify the wholesale prices Saint-Mont's vintners had to charge—far higher than those the big distillers could easily find beyond the borders of France.

Agricultural consultants warned Plaimont's members that they must think seriously about going back to their region's traditional grapes, using traditional methods, spacing the vines widely, and accepting lower yields for higher quality, and also about selling their wines direct to consumers rather than in bulk to distillers. Otherwise they risked losing everything—soil quality, which deteriorated after years of intensive cultivation; the few old vines that survived; their livelihoods. The French wine-standards board had in the early 1970s created *vins de pays*, a new category to encourage winemakers to rediscover and improve the making of minor wines popular in their home territories but viewed by the larger wine world as unremarkable. Even the name, "wines of the country," with its implication of a specific rural place, gave new respect to what had been thought inconsequential; and it sounded better than *vin ordinaire* or *vin de table*.

Gascony's vibrant charm has a distinctly Catalan touch: from the top of the hill in Saint-Mont, where there is a beautiful medieval monastery church with marvelous Romanesque capitals, you can see the Pyrenees. A Catalan sociability and proud independence leaven the usual French standoffishness and conservatism. Dubosc was well aware that southwestern France is particularly rich in eccentric grapes, and he hoped somehow to bottle that charm. He began a campaign to persuade the members of his cooperative to replant their vineyards and develop new *vins de pays* assembled from local grapes that hadn't been

grown commercially for decades. He also asked them to reduce vine yield by half in order to encourage better flavor, even though that could mean sacrificing profits in the short term.

Dubosc won a new wine appellation, Côtes de Saint-Mont, from the slow-moving wine-standards board. He built new caves and bottling plants. He traveled the globe to make a name and a market for Plaimont wines, emphasizing not just high quality for moderate prices but also the worth of old varieties given new vigor. His efforts produced dramatic results: when Dubosc was elected managing director of the cooperative, in 1979, it had two employees; today it has 130.

Plaimont wines neatly check the effects of Gascon cuisine, which prides itself on excess. After showing me around the cooperative and several vineyards, Jean-Pierre Grangé, Plaimont's executive manager, demonstrated this at Auberge de la Bidouze, a nearby restaurant where seemingly everyone within a thirty-mile radius who isn't eating at home gathers daily for lunch (see *Palate at Large*). With barely cooked slices of duck breast Grangé ordered one of Plaimont's *vins de pays*: the golden and wonderfully named Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh, a full, sweet wine usually sipped as an aperitif or with dessert, and in the Gers frequently paired with foie gras.

This was the wine that won me over to Plaimont, and the first I looked for when I got home. It includes four local grape varieties, each with a name nearly as distinctive as the wine's: Petit Courbu, for body and structure; Petit and Gros Manseng, for sweetness; and Arrufiac, for a cleansing acidity at the end. Sauternes and other big, sweet wines, the ones most people would order with foie gras, can stand up to its richness. But those big wines coat the tongue and palate with their syrupy power. Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh instead defats the mouth, preparing it for the next foray. It's like a *trou gascon*—the neat shot of Armagnac tossed back midmeal to ready you for cassoulet.

Now when I see foie gras on a menu, this is the only wine I can think of pairing with it. (Plus I like pronouncing the name.) Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh, at about

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\$15 a bottle, is significantly less expensive than Sauternes, about \$40 a bottle. Plaimont makes three versions: the principal one, with grapes harvested at the end of October; Saint-Albert, from a mid-November harvest; and Saint-Sylvestre, from grapes harvested around December 31. The all-purpose, earliest version is best with food. The later-harvest versions are sweet and potent enough in flavor to warrant inclusion in the *vin de meditation* category, meaning best tried on their own; they also make impressive and relatively inexpensive gifts.

Grangé then showed me a more modern pairing: a purply-pink slice of ham, of the kind Dubosc's brother cures, with a red wine Plaimont recently began marketing as a *vin de soif*. This "wine to slake thirst" was inspired by the low-alcohol wine in bottles that vineyard workers once kept cool in streams for their afternoon breaks. The red version is made from two familiar varieties, Syrah and a southwestern oddball, Duras. The bright, berrylike flavor makes it a good foil for pasta and pizza and even salads. At a time when many wines are increasing in alcohol to show their muscle and justify their prices, this is a refreshing wine that can safely be drunk at lunch. It has a lunchtime price, too: about \$6.00 a bottle.

Jancis Robinson, one of the world's most respected writers on wine, who has long admired Dubosc, told me that this sort of innovation is surprisingly rare. The French stick to what they know, believing that the rest of the world will follow them—as, once, it invariably did. In the past ten years, though, France's major followers in the wine world—Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, and Spain—have begun taking their own paths. Often that means searching out rare grapes in danger of disappearing. At least they are keeping alive grapes and wines—even if continents removed from their places of origin—that don't deserve to fade away. Dubosc knows that Gascony's comparative isolation has been both an obstacle and a blessing. He is one of the few French winemakers building a region's future by reviving its past. ■

Corby Kummer is a senior editor of The Atlantic.

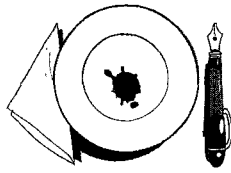
DUCK SAUCE À LA BIDOUZE

A simple—and libertine—Gascon dish

BY CORBY KUMMER

.....

As I drove the several hours south-east from Bordeaux to the Gascon city of Auch last summer, it was hard not to pull into driveway after driveway, lured by signs advertising home-jarred confit and foie gras. Farmers in the valley of the river from which the Gers, the area around Auch, takes its name grow corn on an industrial scale, and save some to feed the ducks and geese each family fattens as a sideline. All families put up their own confit and foie gras as a point of pride, even if they don't sell it.



Gascon chefs are famous for showcasing their fantastically rich meats in a whole repertoire of dishes with similarly deep and straightforward flavors. Twenty years ago Paula Wolfert started a Gascon vogue in this country with her great *The Cooking of South-West France*. But with the rise of fat-fearing nutritionists, even those who wished to believe her promise of “a healthy approach to cooking with poultry fats, lard, butter, cream and crème fraîche” gave up. Now that the Atkins diet, full of proteins and fats, is staging a revival, cooks would do well to go back to Wolfert's book (it has just been reissued).

This cuisine never, of course, went out of style at home. “Fat and meat are what we eat,” André Dubosc, a local wine-maker, told me during my visit. “We call vegetables ‘herbs.’ This is the country of the French paradox, remember. Goose fat is why we Gascons live so long.”

Dubosc made sure I had lunch at Auberge de la Bidouze, an inn and restaurant near the village of Saint-Mont. Georgette Dubos, the generous hostess and owner, must set a good table in order to live up to the thriving tradition of home cooking. Bidouze is a midday rendezvous for people who are professionally discerning about their *plats* and *vins*: the two main Gers businesses are growing corn and making wines to be distilled into Armagnac. Dubos and

André Brulé, the big, hearty chef she works with, serve a slightly dressed-up version of local cuisine.

Any Bidouze meal includes vast portions of foie gras and slices of fattened-duck breast—specialties once reserved for Christmas but now affordable every day. The meat of fattened geese and ducks is matchlessly rich; the breast, called *magret*, is prized everywhere in France. As with foie gras, a simple presentation best reveals the flavor of *magret*, and as with foie gras the usual accompaniments are rich

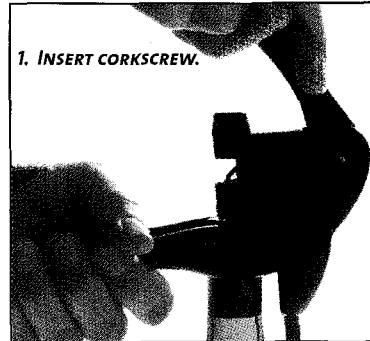
and sweet, to double the intensity—no wimpy attempts at acidic sparseness here.

With *magret* Dubos serves a sauce enriched with crème fraîche and flavored with quickly made caramel and Floc de Gascogne, a fortified sweet wine served as an apéritif and with foie gras. I found her sauce to be the best I'd ever tried with duck breast. Simple to assemble and calling for no hard-to-find ingredients, it will turn any meal of sautéed or roasted poultry (or leftover slices) into an occasion.

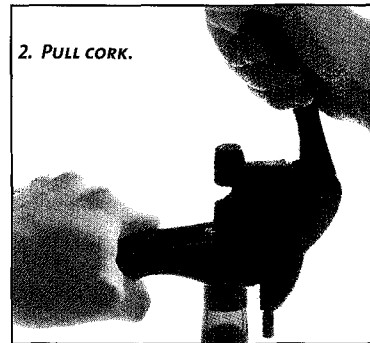
Many butchers stock or will order duck breast. Goose would be even more festive. For his recent *A Goose in Toulouse*, Mort Rosenblum investigated the current state of the long-standing goose-duck controversy. “Purists still like the stronger goose flavor, gamey and pungent,” he wrote about the Gers; he also spoke with a Toulouse chef who called duck “much finer, much tastier, more flexible.” Finally he consulted André Daguin, the chef who introduced rare sliced duck breast and sautéed fresh foie gras to the world from the Hôtel de France, his Auch establishment. (He sold it in 1997, and many have still not forgiven him.) Whichever meat or foie gras one might prefer, Daguin (who refused to take a stand) said pragmatically, the fact is that ducks “are so much easier to raise and to fatten” that they vastly outnumber geese. He added that duck and goose fat—the mainstays of

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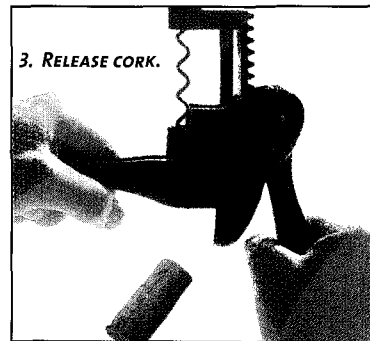
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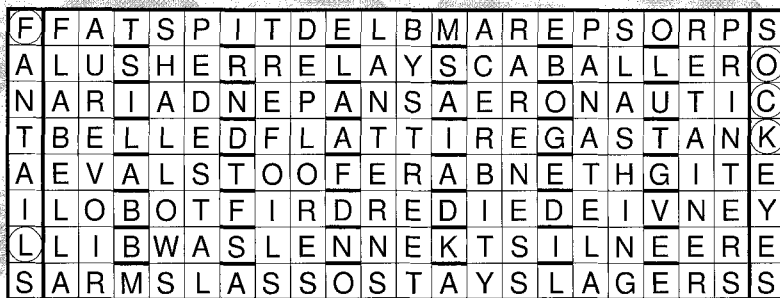
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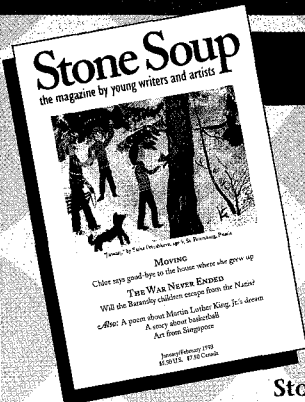
Across. A. TIGHTEN (homophone); B(A + REF)OOT; S(L)AVE B. ARMS (anag.); L + AS + SO; ST + A(Y)S; LA(GER)'S C. PRO(S)PER; A + M + BLED; TI(PSTA)FF (*past anag.*) D. EN(VIE)D; EID + ER (rev.); D + RIFT; OBOL (hidden rev.) E. BELLE + D; FL + ATTIRE; GA + STANK F. L + USHER; R + EL(w)AY'S; CA(BALL)ERO (*ace or anag.*) G. RE(EN)DST (*line anag.*); KEN + NEL (*Len rev.*); SAW + BILL H. ARIADNE (anag.); PANS (rev.); AERONAUTIC (*a neurotic anag.*) **Down.** 1. FLAB + ELLA 2. AU + REV(O)IR (*river rev.*) 3. SH(ALL)OWS 4. P(ED + EST)AL 5. T(REF)OILS 6. DEP(LORE)'S (*sped rev.*) 7. LAN(d) + TERNS 8. BYSTREET (anag.) 9. A + C(h)ERB)ITY 10. RARENESS (hidden) 11. PAN + ATE + LA 12. SL(ASH)ING 13. RETAINER (double def.) 14. P(R)INTER'S

Gascon cuisine—are no different in flavor. Ariane Daguin, André's daughter, a high-spirited ambassador of all things Gascon, offers duck fat and duck demiglace on the Web site for D'Artagnan, the company she co-founded in 1985 to sell domestic foie gras. ("The duck stops here" is one cute slogan on www.dartagnan.com.)

To make about two cups of George Dubos's sauce, enough to serve at least four people, bring to a boil two tablespoons of water and a quarter cup of sugar in a small, heavy saucepan. Cook uncovered over medium-high heat until the sugar begins to caramelize and starts to color. Remove from heat and pour in one cup of room-temperature chicken stock (work carefully, to avoid burning splatters, and don't worry if the sugar hardens), a tablespoon of duck or goose fat or butter, and a quarter cup of fortified red wine such as ruby port or Madeira—or Floc de Gascogne if you can find it. (Homemade stock is of course best, though low-salt canned is okay. Diluted pan juices are fabulous. If you substitute D'Artagnan demiglace for the stock, dilute it with an equal amount of water.) Simmer, stirring occasionally, over very low heat, covered, for an hour. (You can refrigerate the sauce now and gently rewarm it later.) Before serving, whisk a quarter cup of crème fraîche (Vermont Butter & Cheese Company makes a very good and widely distributed version) into the warm sauce. Continue whisking over low heat until the sauce thickens a bit, about fifteen minutes.

Diagonally score the skin of four boneless duck-breast halves with a sharp knife, being careful not to pierce the flesh; this will enable the cooking meat to render its fat. Season with kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper. Heat a large sauté pan or skillet over medium heat and add the breasts skin side down. Cook until the skin is crisp and brown, about ten to twelve minutes. Turn and cook another five or six minutes. The meat should be pink at the edges and red in the center. Remove the breasts from the pan, cut them into thin slices, ladle on a generous coating of sauce, and serve immediately. Give in to the unapologetically rich flavors. **A**

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AT

DESIGN
HAND TOOLS

Today's most noteworthy pencils, styluses, and pen scanners

BY THOMAS HINE

.....

“Mechanical pencils rule,” my fifteen-year-old grandniece, Genevieve, declared when I invited her to be her generation’s voice on school supplies. “Nobody sharpens anymore.” Then, continuing with a fashion maven’s hyperbole and arbitrary imperatives, she gave a passionate disquisition on types of clickers, new grips, smaller lead sizes, and other niceties of pencil selection. As she consigned the yellow-painted wooden pencil to the wastebasket of history, I felt a rush of nostalgia for the perfumed sharpener shavings of my youth.

In fact the classic wooden pencil is hardly extinct, but one need only take a quick look at the array of vibrantly

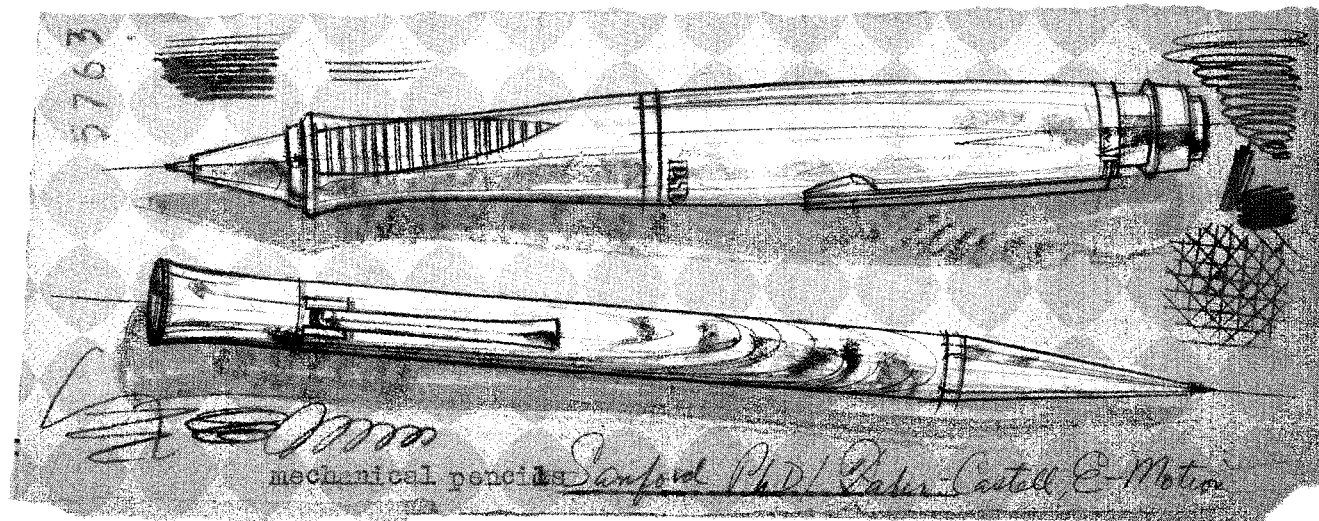
continue to seek out and acquire pencils and pens—and now newer items such as Palm Pilots and pen-shaped scanners.

I had long thought of the mechanical pencil as the dandy of the desk set, an ostentatious substitute for the modest, perfect wooden pencil. In fact the mechanical pencil has changed, though so gradually that its progress has gone largely unheralded. Today you can spend just a few dollars and get a pencil that is easier and more comfortable to use than one that was top of the line, and expensive, two decades ago.

Most contemporary mechanical pencils have clickers or ratchet systems

You can pay hundreds of dollars for a pencil, but its mechanism will be essentially the same as that in the pencils that cost much less. “There are a couple of factories in Japan that make the works for everybody,” Marilyn Brown told me. She runs the “fine writing” department at the New York specialty writing store Art Brown (www.artbrown.com), named for her husband’s late uncle. “But the guys who shop here aren’t going to use a two-dollar pencil. They want to show off.”

Brown took from her display case a mechanical pencil by Faber-Castell, a leading maker of traditional wooden pencils, and let me examine it. Its barrel was made of ribbed Pernambuco wood. “This is just like an old wood pencil,” she said of the elegant object in my hand, “except that it costs \$195.” Then she handed me a \$26.95 model from the same manufacturer, called the E-Motion. It had a wooden barrel, a brushed-metal clip, and an extra-thick 1.4mm lead, thus



colored, subtly textured, high-attitude, low-priced mechanical pencils widely available to see that this writing instrument has become a part of contemporary youth culture.

The emotional appeal of pencils is that they are the instruments of works in progress—the quick sketch of the artist, the lines drawn by the carpenter, the notes and speculations of the scientist. Often they are the tools of people who are themselves works in progress: those in school, trying to figure the world out. Many people never quite get over the allure of school supplies, those first tools of intellect. Throughout their lives they

to advance the lead in very small increments, which reduces the likelihood that you will break the point. They make a fine yet dark line because they use slimmer leads that have been engineered to reduce breakage. The most recent innovations involve ergonomic hand grips that have been softened in some cases and reshaped in others to increase comfort and decrease the possibility of doing damage to one’s hand. The mechanical pencil that finally won me over was a Sanford PhD, which has a fashionably large body; a tapered, textured, three-sided grip; and a sleeve into which the lead can retract. It costs about \$8.00.

evoking both mechanical and wooden pencils of bygone days in a smoothly contemporary form. “This,” she said, “is a real *pencil* pencil.”

Whereas the pencil is more than 400 years old, the Palm Pilot—the product that made personal digital assistants (PDAs) cool—has been around for only six. It comes with a stylus for tapping on the screen and writing notes in the modified alphabet that the device requires you to use. Nevertheless, many people want a different kind of stylus.

The high end of this market is defined by Montblanc’s Royal line of

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styluses, which are virtually identical to the one that comes with the Palm Pilot except that they are encrusted with forty-one diamonds and made of stainless steel (\$1,465), solid gold (\$2,930), or solid platinum (\$3,910). Having gems on surfaces you grip is about as ergonomically sound as having diamonds on the soles of your shoes, but nevertheless there are buyers.

"The steel and gold models are selling," Marion Davidson, the senior vice-president for marketing at Montblanc North America, told me. "And we know exactly who is buying them: the *very rich*." Montblanc also offers gold- or platinum-plated styluses for \$45. All its styluses are designed so that the company's snowcap logo peeks discreetly from the top of the PDA's holder.

Most other styluses look like pens or pencils. In fact, tips are available to transform a writing instrument into a stylus, and Brown says her store performs a lot of these retrofits. But the styluses that are the most fun are the multifunctional ones. At least one model, for example, has a laser pointer, though most just incorporate other writing instruments. The Rotring Quattro data pen (about \$60) is the most enticing of these that I have seen. Its trim black body holds a PDA stylus, a ballpoint, a fine-line mechanical pencil, and a yellow highlighter, each of which can be refilled separately. Its only decoration is a trademark red ring and four icons to help the user select the function desired. The reticence of the design makes the pen's versatility all the more amazing.

"The guys love gadgets," Marilyn Brown said about the multifunctional styluses, which are now her hottest sellers. "The Palm Pilot is a gadget. It makes people want more gadgets."

As a writer who sometimes has trouble reading his own notes, I am greatly intrigued by the pen scanner. The idea here is that you can run the device across a text like a tiny vacuum

cleaner and suck up the words you need. Another kind of pen scanner does instant word-by-word translation, either on a tiny screen on the pen or aloud; and one model, the \$199 QuickLink Super Pen, introduced in the fall of last year by WizCom Technologies, combines the transcription and translation functions in a single device.

I haven't tried the QuickLink Super Pen, but I own the QuickLink Pen (\$169), another WizCom pen scanner, and have used it with only intermittent success. When I returned from the library, there were always just enough inaccuracies in the text, often in the vicinity of a crucial name, date, or number, to make everything suspect. Previously I had been jotting notes I couldn't decipher. The QuickLink Pen merely automated the process.

Unlike competing products, the IRISPen II Executive (about \$200), from Image Recognition Integrated Systems, must be attached to a computer. The company claims that the pen can use the computer's greater processing power to achieve better recognition of the text. But it has trouble with closely spaced lines, and although it is capable of reading aloud, when it does so, English sounds like Swedish.

WizCom has sold about 700,000 of its pen scanners worldwide, with few complaints or returns, according to Raz Itzhaki, the executive vice-president and CFO. The IRISPen has won good reviews for its accuracy. But all of today's pen scanners demand that users adapt to their technology, rather than the reverse.

Still, if their makers can devise improvement after improvement to overcome the pens' shortcomings and deliver on their promise, these companies may one day come up with a product—like today's improved mechanical pencil—that no savvy fifteen-year-old can do without. ■

Thomas Hine is the author of five books on design and culture. His newest, I Want That! How We All Became Shoppers, will be published this month.

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THE PUZZLER

by EMILY COX and HENRY RATHVON

Crystal Ball

Answers to this puzzle's numbered ("Clear") clues go in the unshaded cells along the paths indicated by the clue numbers. For example, the first answer at 1-8 starts in the cell marked 1 and goes southeast in the first four cells along the path toward 8; the second goes east in the four unshaded cells after the heavy bar, ending in the cell marked 8. Some entries follow a bending path from border to border: "Unclear" answers, each six letters long, are clued in random order. These should be entered radially from one of the shaded border cells to one of the central cells or vice versa. Half go inward and half go outward; each passes through two shaded cells. Their places in the grid can be determined with help from the Clear entries. By reading the shaded cells clockwise from the one pointing upward in the uppermost left, solvers will discover the nature of the Crystal Ball (on the perimeter) and a prediction (within). Nine clue answers are capitalized.

Last month's Puzzler solution is on page 164.

CLEAR

- 1-8 Brazilian lady love involved in element of destiny? (4)
Portent's unlimited significance (4)
- 2-7 Bottle for brandy and container for beer found in bar (8)
- 3-6 Eat up, having wandered back outside (6)
- 5-12 Destined for following gold car (4)
A group of geese along English river (4)
- 6-11 Observe Spielberg creation put up for sale again (8)
- 7-10 Doctor's name broadcast (6)
- 9-16 I camped in park with a rabbit-like creature (4)
Something spouted, "As you were saying?" (4)
- 10-15 Step on the scale with meadow mice, holding five in turns (8)
- 11-14 Milton playing woman in comedy (6)

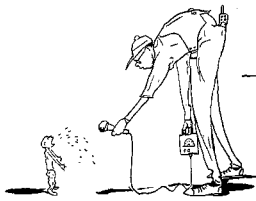
- 13-20 Jack and I have exaggerated talk (4)
Garment left in collection of materials (4)
- 14-19 Holiday approaches, consuming "Y" (3,5)
- 15-18 Became aware of polar opposites in offspring (6)
- 17-24 In audience, provoke crown (4)
Small nose full of punch (4)
- 18-23 Baboon chomped down on something boring (5,3)
- 19-22 Second fruit oozes (6)
- 21-4 Traps belonging to Du Bois (4)
Earned high marks on an album including Beethoven's Third (4)
- 22-3 Drew is on the way back, given a ring (8)
- 23-2 Stand for consequences of too much acid? (6)

UNCLEAR

- a. Section of glass capturing a victory dance

- b. Terrible thirst for casual wear (*hyphenated*)
- c. Gold Glover taking part in Buffalo marathon
- d. Tug returns after you and I rise to the surface (*two words*)
- e. Place nearby post office in cathedral area
- f. Dad clumsily handles fruits
- g. Sulfur found in dead leaf added to a journal
- h. A ramshackle farm with empty building (*hyphenated*)
- i. Hawthorne heroine has partying need, oddly
- j. Chewer of scenery suffered tragedy
- k. South end of Laredo, and not a place in Mexico
- l. Floor material on a slant missing middle piece

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.



WORD FUGITIVES

by BARBARA WALLRAFF

The July/August edition of this page sought words for three kinds of human relationships, including that between a bride's parents and her groom's. Over the centuries English has assimilated words from dozens of languages, a number of which do have words for this relationship—but English has yet to borrow or invent any such term.

More than a few readers suggested that we turn to Yiddish for help. Herb Zweig, of Woodland Hills, California, wrote, "See Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish*. *Machetayneste* (the *ch* is guttural) means the mother of your child's spouse; *machuten* means the father of your child's spouse; and *machetunim* means the extended family of your spouse, so it describes these relationships from the children's point of view. Rosten tells an old joke: Why did Adam and Eve live so long? Because they had no *machetunim*."

Other people invoked other languages. Sally Sordinas, of Corfu, Greece, wrote, "My Greek son-in-law's mother calls me *symbethèra*." Roberta Kedzierski, of Milan, Italy, wrote, "There is a word in Italian: *consuoceri*." Several people wrote to say that in Spanish the term is *consuegros*. Note, however, the masculine *o* preceding the plural *s*. Barry Hammel, of Santa Ana, Costa Rica, warned, "In these days of gender sensibility, using just the male term for both (as in Spanish) is a no-no. Even in Spanish one occasionally sees written, among the e-mail crowd, such things as *compañer@s* to replace *compañeros y compañeras*."

Dan Moerman, a professor of anthropology at the University of Michigan at Dearborn, submitted a veritable treatise about terminology used in his profession, including the following: "*Consanguineal*, or blood, relatives are all those people with whom you share an ancestor. *Affinal* relatives, or in-laws, are all your relatives by marriage. For the parents of the bride and groom,

affines is a perfectly acceptable term."

And Ernie Joaquin, of DeKalb, Illinois, wrote, "In the Philippines the Tagalog term for the relationship between parents of bride and groom is *magbalaë*. They call one another, or they are called, *balae*." Admittedly, no more than other readers' suggestions do these terms seem poised to enter the American English mainstream—though Tagalog has brought us such words as *ylang-ylang* and *boondocks*. Nonetheless, for their exoticism they earn Joaquin top honors.



Also sought was a word for aunts and uncles collectively, together with one for nieces and nephews. For "nieces and nephews" various readers submitted *danglings*, *kidlings*, *subsiblings*, *sublings*, *sibsprings*, and *nibblings*. Among them was Susan E. Hodge, of Teaneck, New Jersey, who explained that among other things, she teaches genetic counseling, and when she does, she uses the terms *nibblings* and *auncles*.

Curious about the idea that these words might actually be current scientific terminology, I asked Hodge, who turns out to be a professor of psychiatry and biostatistics at Columbia University, if she might tell me more about them. She replied, "I contacted half a dozen or more senior geneticists/genetic

counselors for you. To my surprise, only one of them had heard the word *nibbling* before, and she did not know where she had heard it. One of my contacts sent out an inquiry on a genetic counselors' listserv. She got lots of responses, and none of them had heard of *nibbling*. But one respondent had heard the term *auncle* for 'aunt or uncle.' Interestingly, there is now a Heisenberg effect in play. Several of my respondents wrote back, 'Gee, Sue, I've never heard that word before, but it's a great word and I think I'll start using it.'" Thus, not so much for originality as for rigor, diligence, and influence on the real world, Hodge takes top honors here.

Now MIKE LEWIECKI, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, writes, "We all encounter people in cars, airports, and shopping centers who seem to have a cell phone glued to one of their ears. I would like to have a word to describe these people."

And RICHARD SIEGELMAN, of East Norwich, New York, writes, "We need a word to say to people who have just coughed. Coughing probably leads to death more often than sneezing does, but it is only sneezers who get wished good health (*gesundheit*) and blessed by God (*God bless you*). This is just not fair! Coughers deserve hearing comparable words or phrases of sympathy!"

Send words that meet Mike Lewiecki's or Richard Siegelman's needs to Word Fugitives, The Atlantic Monthly, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or visit the Word Fugitives page on our Web site, at www.theatlantic.com/fugitives. Submissions must be received by December 31. Use the same addresses to submit word fugitives that you'd like The Atlantic's help in finding. Letters become the property of Word Fugitives and may be edited.

Readers whose queries are published and those whose words are singled out for top honors will each receive, with our thanks, a selection of recent autographed books by Atlantic authors. The next installment's correspondents will be sent *I Want That!*, by Thomas Hine; *Afterglow*, by Francis Davis; and *All Is Vanity*, by Christina Schwarz.

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— Suzan M.

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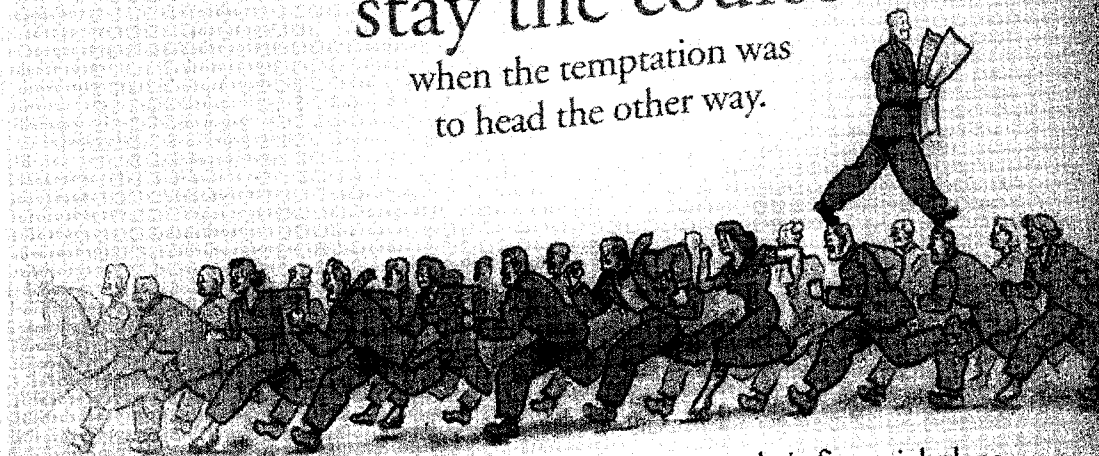
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